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# TALES FROM

# BLACKWOOD

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Blackwood's magazine

# TALES

FROM

# "BLACKWOOD"

New Series

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# CONTENTS OF THE ELEVENTH VOLUME.

THE HAUNTED ENGHENIO.

MILLY'S FIRST LOVE.

MRS BEAUCHAMP'S VENGEANCE.

A FAMILY FEUD.

THE DISAPPOINTING BOY.

THE COTTAGE BY THE RIVER.

A RIDE FOR LIFE.

A SKETCH FROM BABYLON.

THE ENGINE-DRIVER TO HIS ENGINE.

THE COACHMAN OF THE "SKYLARK."

# TALES FROM "BLACKWOOD."

## THE HAUNTED ENGHENIO.

[*MAGA.* JANUARY 1872.]

SOME years since, I chanced to be in Rio de Janeiro. I had just returned from a trip into the interior, and was idling away the last few days of my stay in South America, enjoying the incomparable beauty of the scenery of that sierra-locked harbour. To avoid the heat and bustle of the town, I had taken up my abode at a small *venda* on the northern shore of the bay; and there one evening I was as usual sitting out in the veranda, enjoying my after-dinner cigar and cup of coffee. I was gradually sinking into a reverie, trying to fancy myself surrounded by the dear ones at home, wishing that they too could with me sit and watch the ever-changing dreamy beauty of the scene. "As the Thames (below Blackwall) is to the Bay of Naples, so is the Bay of Naples to the Harbour of Rio," thought I, when my cogitations were interrupted

by the sounds of a mule's hoofs pounding along the sandy beach-road which passed in front of the venda. In another moment the mule and its rider were in sight, and rather to my disgust I perceived that the latter evidently was bent on patronising the same house as myself. I did not feel in the mood to be disturbed, and the new-comer was of anything but a prepossessing appearance. So coated was he with white dust and dried mud-splashes that it was next to impossible to make him out, but I mentally put him down as some stray Portuguese or *fazendiero* from some neighbouring coffee estate. His mule, though seeming nearly "played out," was a powerful beast, and the saddle certainly English. I saw, too, as he dismounted, that he was well armed, and wore a revolver and knife on his hip, Yankee fashion. There was no bell, and the house blacks having carefully made themselves scarce, the stranger had to lead his own mule off to the stables in rear of the venda. I had almost forgotten the new arrival, and was watching the sunset on the bald peaks of the Sugar-loaf and the Corcovado, when I heard a step in the room behind me, and the stranger came out into the veranda where I was sitting. I should hardly have recognised him, a wash and change of clothes had made such an alteration. Now, though, that the dust and mud were washed from his face and beard, I could see that he looked fearfully worn and ill. He

was a good deal sunburnt, but sallow and colourless, and, though not yet a middle-aged man, stooped considerably. I still took him for a Portuguese, and was fairly startled when he addressed some remark to me in the purest English.

"You will, I trust, excuse me; but I have been living for so long amongst natives and niggers that it is quite a treat to hear one's own language again, and I could not fail to recognise you as a countryman."

"Well," said I, "for my part I confess I did not take *you* for one."

"Not likely; my best friend of six months since would hardly know me now, for I have been 'down' with swamp-fever, and half dead; and besides, I am just 'off' a 150 miles' ride in four days. Not bad work over the sierra this time of year."

We chatted on for some time, and I soon found that he was the manager of a large coffee plantation in the interior belonging to the Visconde de B——. From coffee culture our conversation naturally turned on slavery, and I remember how strongly, whilst listening to him, the idea impressed itself on my mind, that the practical views of one unprejudiced man, who really understood the habits and nature of the blacks, was worth more than all the well-meaning nonsense ever talked in Parliament, or the vindictive cant of a Jamaica Committee assembled in Exeter Hall! After a pause in

the conversation, during which we each puffed away at our respective cigarettes, my new acquaintance abruptly asked, "Did you ever see or ever hear of —a black ghost?"

"Can't say I ever did," replied I, with a laugh; "thought they were always white."

"No, I don't mean *that* exactly; I mean the ghost of a black man. I have seen a good deal of native races myself—natives of every hue and species, from yellow Chinese to black niggers—but till a couple of months ago I never came across anything resembling the ghost of one. I remember once a rabid slave-owner in the Southern States trying to prove that niggers were cattle! and one of his points was that a nigger had no soul! 'for,' says the Southern chap, convincingly, 'there never was a white man yet (or a black one for that matter) who ever set eyes on a nigger's ghost.'

"'Guess not,' struck in one of the crowd; 'a nigger's ghost (if he's got one) must be black, mustn't it? and as you only see ghosts in the night, how the thunder could you see a black ghost in a black night? no, siree. Happen, though, if you could fix up a *white* night you might see—a few.' But if you like I will tell you a rather uncomfortable experience I myself had a short time since; mind I don't say it *was* a ghost, and you need not believe it, but it *was* uncomfortable—*very*."

I expressed my delight at the prospect of a

"yarn;" and so, without further preface, he commenced.

"I was telling you just now that the *fazenda* of which I am the manager is a very large one, and that it has been cultivated for a great number of years—that is, for *this* part of the world.

"Twenty or five-and-twenty years ago the district which we are now working was all virgin forest, and the only part of the estate under coffee and sugar was the 'Boa Vista,' the eastern end of the estate, ten miles from where we now are. The old fazenda of Boa Vista is standing yet, and is as lovely a spot as you could well find. There are almost miles of avenues of fruit-trees—mangoes, oranges, cachoes, palms, bananas, and numbers of others—whilst the roads through the coffee-mills are literally hedged with pines; but everything is going to ruin, faster and faster each year, and the place forcibly reminds you of what the Garden of Eden might have been, if, after Adam's expulsion, a joint-stock company had taken it up, gone bankrupt, and got into Chancery. It was the grandfather of the present Visconde who first founded the estate, and, according to the faint reports still current, he must have been one of the real wicked old sort one reads about as having lived in the dark ages. On his vast estates he was absolute as the Czar, and he used his power like a tiger. I have heard grim stories told of the poor blacks he had

flogged to death—strong men, ay, and women too! He had a large establishment, perhaps five hundred field-hands, and he ruled them with a rod of iron. I have heard that, should he see a black touch with the handle of his hoe one coffee-tree whilst clearing the roots of another, the unfortunate slave was sure of a hundred lashes. Well, some he murdered outright, some fled to the woods, and lived like wild beasts, whilst others, more happy, died of ill-usage and starvation; when suddenly a strange complaint appeared. By twos and threes the slaves died off, week after week, month after month, year after year. The muster-roll became smaller and smaller. The old Visconde was frantic. Bribes, medicines, and floggings were all tried, and proved equally powerless to check the strange complaint. Perhaps I am wrong to call it a complaint; it was not one—it was *poison!* Yes, poison. I myself, whilst in Brazil, have known several isolated instances of this, but never anything approaching to the wholesale "killing" that for years went on amongst those poor people at Boa Vista. I can never feel quite certain of the cause. Whether was it owing to the fearful misery of their lives, their wish to die, and so in a manner be revenged on the old tyrant who owned them, or was it a sort of contagious, murderous mania that spread through the whole mass of slaves? I myself fancy the former; but possibly both causes combined. The

negro, you know, as a rule, does not go in for suicide. The Malay or Javanese does; and down South there (whilst making the Panama line), literally thousands of Chinamen hanged or drowned themselves when fever and starvation brought them low and made their lives miserable. But, from whatever cause it arose, the blacks of Boa Vista died off at a fearful rate; and at last two Portuguese factors disappeared—murdered by the slaves, no doubt. In a few years the muster-roll dwindled from 500 to 300; and, do what he would, the Visconde found the work getting ahead of the overtaxed slaves. Then, partly owing to the mouth of the river silting up, and partly to the dikes being neglected, one rainy season a part of the river-bank was swept away, and never being repaired, hundreds of acres of level land, on part of which sugar had been successfully grown, were flooded, and soon degenerated into marsh. The natural consequence, of course, was, that the malaria soon bred fever of the most malignant type, and the blacks died off faster than ever. Finally, the old Visconde abandoned the fazenda in despair; sold off all his slaves, dispersing them in small gangs to various distant districts; bought 150 new ones, and cleared and planted the hill-ground, ten miles from the old one, where now the new fazenda stands. Though practically deserted, and now, thanks to the ever-increasing marsh, rendered quite uninhabitable ow-

ing to the fever, the plantations (where not entirely overgrown with jungle and *sapakyia*) are still valuable; so every year, when the picking-time comes, a party of thirty or forty blacks is sent over to get what coffee they can; every year the yield becomes less and less, and this year not more than 800 arobas were gathered. We should have got more, but the fever suddenly appeared, though I took every precaution—keeping the people away from the low ground towards evening, and giving them extra rations, including spirits, and changing the gang every few days. In spite of all it attacked us, and in three days we had a dozen on the sick-list. I, of course, gave up work and retreated to the hills: one poor fellow sank after we got home, though. Well, the coffee, or at least a good part of it, was picked, and out on the drying-grounds, but as the blacks could not be left there to take care of it, it stood a fair chance of being stolen, since the river ran close past the *terreiros*, and a canoe-load could be taken in a few minutes. Some one had to take charge of it, and as the only man I could trust besides myself had only just arrived from England with his wife and family, and had not yet gone through a course of tropical hardening as I had, I thought it best to do the work myself. We generally sent a couple of hands over every morning to turn and spread the coffee. As the place was safe enough by day, they remained there, and towards

evening heaped it up again and returned home; so the night was the only time I had to care for. Accordingly, after a day's work—ploughing, draining, sugar-planting, or clearing forest-land—I used to lie down for a couple of hours in my clothes, be called at about 9 P.M., and ride over to the deserted old fazenda of Boa Vista. I had a half-unbroken mule—not the one I am riding now, but a beast that would hardly break her gallop the whole way there—so it did not take me long to get to the clearing (though I had a river and two wide swamps to cross *en route*). The old Enghenio was, of course, situated close to the drying-grounds, and there I used to establish myself for the night. The left wing of the ruinous old building had been formerly the sugar-house, and in it I used to tether my mule; and with the help of a bundle of cigars and an occasional nip of spirits and quinine, I should have passed the night comfortably enough had it not been for the mosquitoes. I used to sit there (myself hid in the deep shadow of the building) and watch the white mist, reeking with poisonous miasma, seething up from the great marsh. How closely it enveloped one, and how strangely and fantastically each well-known object around loomed through it! The brightest moonlight could but dimly struggle down on the weather-stained and time-worn old ruins, so dank and cold and desolate. No sound ever broke the silence but the occasional

cry of some night bird from the marsh, the chattering of bats, and the never-ceasing hum of the mosquitoes. Oh how dreary those long nights were! I used to watch the moon (when now and then I could get a glimpse of it, pale and hazy, through the drifting fog), and guess how long it would take to sink behind the forest-clad sierra; and often I have quite longed to catch sight of some skulking rascal making free with the coffee. I don't think much provocation would have been required to make me pull trigger with a clear conscience, but no one ever came; and from what I afterwards heard, I believe a pile of dollars would have been pretty safe, for the old fazenda had, I found, a 'bad name,' and both blacks and Portuguese are, you know, superstitious enough for anything. So I fancy that not a man in the district would have ventured about the old place after nightfall. Well, one night I had ridden over as usual, though dead tired and sleepy, as you may think, for I had spent the whole day working in a rice-swamp under a grilling sun. I had almost reached the fazenda. The last half-mile or so of the road ran through an avenue of the finest bamboos I ever saw. They must be fifty feet high at the very least, and met overhead in an arch. In daylight it was a shady ride, but by night, even when the moon was well up, it was all but pitch dark, and of course one had to ride at a foot's pace. The avenue was quite straight, so that, like coming

out of a tunnel, you could see an arch of light in front of you long before you reached it. Beyond the end of the bamboos the road swept sharp round to the right, for perhaps a hundred yards or so, through scattered clumps of orange-trees, guava-scrub, &c.; beyond which, on the right, was the half-ruined Enghenio or machine-house, and directly fronting it, on the other side of the road, the terreiros or drying-grounds, now scraped clean of the year's accumulation of weeds, and covered with heaps of half-dried coffee. I had ridden slowly through the bamboo avenue, and was within a few yards of where the white moonlight streamed across the road at its termination, when my mule gave a start aside and suddenly stopped short. No doubt a snake was crossing the path, or she had scented some skulking puma. But at the moment I was half asleep in the saddle (the sun had been more than usually powerful that day, and I confess I was thoroughly fagged). I was thinking (almost dreaming, perhaps) of the former history of the ruined fazenda, and mixed up with these thoughts of the past were vague speculations as to the present—the chances of a meeting with coffee thieves, &c.—when the sudden halt of my mule brought me back in a moment to a state of thorough wakefulness. Instinctively I grasped my revolver, and was ready for action. For some time, as I advanced, I had heard, without listening to them,

the various and ordinary night-sounds of a tropical swamp, the dabbling and splashing of water-fowl, the endless chorus of frogs and suchlike; but now, after the first moment of attention, I became convinced that a fresh sound was added to them. Surely I could not be mistaken. No; there it was —a sound that I had heard for hours together every day of my life at the hill fazenda—the quick regular beat of a water-wheel, and the steady rush of water through the sluices. In a moment it flashed across me that the suspected thieves had come early, and were making a night of it, coolly cleaning our coffee with our own machinery, which was still in a condition to do its work in a sort of way.

"A touch of the spur set the mule going again, and in a few seconds I was round the bend, and caught a glimpse of the upper storey of the Enghenio looming up above the orange-clumps and guava-scrub. I noticed the old building seemed to be lit up, and I could hear the rush of water and the beat of the wheel plainer than ever. I guided my mule off the road so as to approach without being heard, and, revolver in hand, cantered through the orange-grove. As I first caught sight of the terreiro, I shall never forget my astonishment at the sight before me. I had only an end view of the Enghenio, but four of the front windows seemed to be open, as I could see the broad

streams of light thrown strongly across the drying-ground, which, strange to say, was literally crowded with blacks. I could see them distinctly—their dusky forms flitting backwards and forwards from the drying-ground to the Enghenio, carrying in the coffee in large baskets. Several had torches, and I could even distinguish a couple of overseers directing the work. The blacks, I noticed, were all working silently, and 'at the run.' The first idea that struck me was, that one of our worthy neighbours, whom I knew to be quite capable of robbery or anything else, had brought down the whole of his people, and was intent on making a clean sweep of our coffee. Insensibly I slackened speed as I dodged my way through the last clump of orange-trees. As I did so a thicker wreath of mist seemed to seethe up from the marsh; the ruddy flow of light from the open windows appeared to fall out, and the hurrying slaves, whom a few moments before I had so distinctly seen, seemed to melt away into the darkness. Another stride carried me clear of the orange-trees at a point within twenty yards of the Enghenio. I pulled up with a quick jerk, utterly bewildered, for there, close before me, was the drying-ground, covered with its regular heaps of coffee, not one displaced—nothing stirring, nothing visible—the whole place as silent and solitary as when I last visited it the night before. I sat there for perhaps a minute,

unable even to think, but with a strange feeling of awe creeping over me; for up to that moment it had never struck me that I was subject to an illusion. Even then I could hardly force myself to believe that what I felt morally certain I had actually *seen* was not real, and I half expected to see the troops of blacks come hurrying out of the Enghenio again. No—not a trace of them. Then I thought of the great water-wheel. I had *heard* that going, and *could* not be mistaken. With a feeling not far from dread I rode past the Enghenio towards the sugar-house, which was the right wing of the building (the machinery was all in the centre, and the coffee-stores in the left wing nearest to me). As I slowly rode along the front, I saw that the windows, from which so shortly before I had seen the streams of light issuing, were closed as usual, the shutters, grey and steaming with damp, shining coldly in the pale moonlight. The centre door, leading into the machine-house, was fast, and the rusty padlock and chain seemed untouched. The sugar-house was open on one side, and into this I rode my mule, dismounted, and tethered her, and then unfastened a small lantern which I always brought with me, struck a light, and proceeded to explore the building. Nothing seemed changed; there was no trace of any one having visited it since I was last there. Then I went into the machine-house. Squeezing between the mandioca-

mill and a disused sugar-press, I made my way to the part of the building partitioned off for the water-wheel. I knew *it* would satisfy me. Several of the planks had rotted, and fallen back into the watercourse below; they had left a large gap in the partition, through which I looked at the wheel. A cold chill passed through me as I did so. The broad floats were as dry as tinder, and the wheel itself was held locked by a fallen rafter which had passed through its arms—it had not moved for a year; and there, twelve or fifteen feet below me, I could see the water unconfined by sluice or shuttle, which had long since been washed away, running silently along the shoot, and not even touching the lowest float of the wheel. Two or three bats, disturbed by the light, fluttered up past me, and they were the only signs of life I could see. Then I *knew* that what I had seen could not be real—but how to account for the noise of the wheel and the stampers too! How my head ached that night! (it does now, for that matter;) but I sat there in the sugar-house puzzling over the strange sight I had seen till near daylight, and then rode home again. I could eat no breakfast, I remember, but went out to see some fresh land they were clearing; but I turned ill, and had to come home; and by evening I was down with swamp-fever, and raving. I had a baddish turn of it; and a precious row, they tell me, I made. And the odd thing is,

that I can remember many of the delusions which I had then, as clearly as if they had been facts; but the real facts I have either forgotten entirely, or only remember as one does a dream. Now, sir, that's my story, and it is for you to judge whether it was the fever that brought me the niggers' ghosts, or the niggers' ghosts the fever. I hope I am not in for another dose of it; my head feels very queer. Well, anyhow, I have had a long day, and so will turn in—good-night."

He rose, and, shivering slightly, moved off to his room; and I, after musing a while over the strange story which I had heard, followed his example. The next morning, when I came down to breakfast, I asked José, the factotum of the venda, if the stranger had yet gone out.

"No, Senor, he's ill—has the fever, and I have been with him for the last two hours: he wants to speak to you, Senor."

Accordingly I repaired to his room, and found him, as José had said, down with fever; he was quite sensible, though, and thanked me for coming.

"I thought very likely you would be crossing the bay to Rio this morning; if you do, would you kindly ask the English doctor to give me a call? I have got a touch of this wretched fever back again. José tells me that early this morning I was talking a great deal of nonsense, but I hope I did not disturb or bore you last night."

I assured him to the contrary, and in the course of the morning found out and sent the doctor to see him. His attack was very light, and in a few days he was about again, but he never again mentioned the long night's watching in the old Enghenio. Was the fever-madness in him when he saw that strange sight at the abandoned fazenda? Or was it so when he told me the story before his second attack? I'm sure I know not, but it was a strange weird tale either way.

# MILLY'S FIRST LOVE.

BY MARGARET VELEY.

[*MAGA.* SEPTEMBER 1870.]

WHEN Milly Hope was seventeen, being a dear, foolish little girl, she naturally thought it was time to fall in love. Accordingly she worshipped Mr Matthew Warburton. She had no young lady friend with whom to gossip and giggle, and her innocent passion grew in pure and sacred silence. A girl's first love is never so truly a poem as when it is a song without words; and such was Milly's for Mr Warburton.

As to her choice I neither blame nor defend it, because it appears to me that she had none. Of course I do not mean that there was not another man in Drayford. There was Arthur Mannering, the Rector's son, a heavy, unwholesome-looking youth, whose University career had been cut disreputably short, and who was at home simply because his relations "didn't know where on earth to send him," as they candidly avowed. Little Milly

could hardly fall in love with Mr Arthur Mannering. There was Dr Ford, but he was fifty-three and wore a chestnut wig. There was his assistant, a meek, little, pink-faced man, but he was engaged to a young lady in Birmingham. The curate was married, and so were both the lawyers. So was one of the three bank clerks, another was a mere boy, and the third was inconceivably ugly. (Milly was not acquainted with this trio: I mention them only to make my list more complete.) Therefore I maintain that she had no choice, and is not to be either commended or condemned for her worship of Mr Matthew Warburton.

He was decidedly the leading man of the place. He was the second partner in the Drayford Bank; and Mr Maitland, the senior, lived seven miles away at Langton Grove, and was a comparative stranger to the townspeople.

Mr Warburton was a man of nine-and-thirty. Twelve or fourteen years before, his pretensions to good looks had been universally acknowledged, and they were very considerable at the time of which I write. Unfortunately he had grown somewhat stout, and his complexion was not as delicately pink and white as in old days, the former tint a little predominating. (Do not for one moment imagine him with a red face—the words I have used are the very utmost that could be said. The face was not coarse, though something in it somehow

suggested the idea of possible coarseness.) He was a big and decidedly handsome man; whose hair, eyebrows, mustache, and whiskers were thick, strong, and black; whose aspect was frank, easy, and good-tempered, though a keen observer might detect the under-current of violence and obstinacy; who swaggered in his walk and talk, and doubtless in his thoughts; who was vain of his good looks, of his undoubted ability as a man of business, and of his position at Drayford; and who rolled out his boastful but good-natured talk in a cheery bass voice. Not much that was heroic about him, and yet I think not at all an unlikely hero for a child of seventeen, whose experience of men was so remarkably restricted.

There was not a great deal of society in Drayford, and what there was was considerably flavoured with tea—a beverage and a style of entertainment which, it might be surmised, would find little favour in the eyes of a man like Mr Warburton. But such was not the case. He was too practical a man to be more than partially blinded by his vanity. It was absolutely necessary to his happiness that he should be courted and caressed. He was morbidly aware that he was not as young as he had been. But among these dowagers, spinsters, old bachelors, and prosy married folks, he felt himself the very incarnation of youth, health, activity, and good looks. He had horrible misgivings that in a livelier and more brilliant circle he might meet with competi-

tors who would rob him of his sovereignty, label him as middle-aged, make fun of him behind his back, and hand him over to the dowagers as a confirmed old bachelor. Although his fears were a little exaggerated there was considerable foundation for them, and the fact that they were entertained by him explains his contentment with the insipid calm of Drayford society. At least he was its leader; and a very gracious and condescending autocrat he made.

If Mr Matthew Warburton may be likened to an amiable and gentle lion, roaring loudly but harmlessly in Drayford drawing-rooms, then might Milly Hope's aunt, Mrs Rivers, be described as 1st jackal, helping the stately animal to the banquets of which he was pleased to partake. I mean no disrespect to the lady in question. Second in Drayford society to Mr Warburton alone, her tea-parties outshone all other tea-parties in splendour, and she occasionally rose to the magnificence of a dinner. It had come to be an understood thing that Mr Warburton should look in every Tuesday evening, when Mrs Rivers always contrived to get up a rubber. In fact the Drayford lion was very much at home in that house, and came and went pretty much as he pleased. He liked the pretty, spacious drawing-room; he liked Mrs Rivers, a cheery handsome widow of fifty-five; he liked the universal attention he received, the talk, the music.

And little Milly Hope? I am afraid for a long while Mr Warburton never thought of her. Of course he was perfectly aware that there was an insignificant little girl, whom he called "Miss Milly" if he had to speak to her; to whom he nodded familiarly if he met her in the street (sending a thrill of pleasure through the bounding little heart); with whom he shook hands absently, as a matter of course, on entering and leaving the room (Milly would not have omitted that ceremony on any account): and that was all. No; if he came to Mrs Rivers's parties for any young lady he came for Bella Mannering.

Bella was the Rector's daughter, tall, slight, with a keen, bold, handsome face. She was four-and-thirty, and for the last eight years had been laying snares for Mr Matthew Warburton. Her great eyes were as bright and fearless as ever, but her face was a little worn. Kind Drayford critics remarked that though her cheeks were the least thought sunken, she always had the most becoming colour. Hers was a striking face, especially by candle-light, with her big brilliant eyes, her arched brows, her blooming cheeks, and her vividly scarlet lips. She could not fairly complain of Mr Warburton, though the flirtation had lasted so long, and had as yet come to nothing. She had courted his attentions, and he had graciously responded—that was all.

Still it was an understood thing that Miss Mannering amused and pleased the Drayford despot,

and liked the office. Also, it was an established fact that no one knew exactly how to turn over the leaves of Miss Mannering's music except Mr Warburton; and her powerful contralto voice never rang out so triumphantly as when he was leaning over her, and looking at her with eyes which, if not quite as big or brilliant, were even more fearless than her own.

Bella Mannering believed that the hour of her triumph approached. She had never had a rival, and it seemed to her, from many slight signs, that the fortress she had so patiently besieged would surrender at last. She was not a bad girl. She did really care for Matthew Warburton. And she was grateful—she would have gone through fire and water for Mrs Rivers, who had given her so many opportunities of meeting him.

It was not a Tuesday evening with its unvarying accompaniment of whist, but a larger and more general gathering. Mr Warburton, Dr Ford, the curate and his wife, and Miss Mannering, had dined there, and a few more had made their appearance in the evening. Bella's place at dinner had been next the banker, and his attentions had never been so marked. Now that the three gentlemen had left Mrs Rivers's excellent wine, and came steering their way through the sprinkling of ladies, it was very evident where Mr Warburton intended to cast anchor. Bella carelessly swept aside her trailing skirt and re-

vealed a low and hitherto partially-hidden easy-chair. Into this he subsided with a broad contented smile, and resumed the talk they had so lately dropped.

Bella thought the time had come for a decisive stroke. Having mentally laid down the general rule that too complete submission courted contempt and defeated its own end, she proceeded to apply it to her own case. But such an application required the most delicate skill.

Miss Mannering commenced by being capricious. Assuming an air of cool independence, she was haughtily uncertain whether she would or would not sing when her admirer asked her. He was undoubtedly surprised, and for a moment hesitated what to do. Bella would have been content with the slightest homage on his part, as a mere token of some power on hers; but she had mistaken him. She knew he was not deficient in common-sense, and she imagined that his common-sense must in a measure overrule and pierce through his vanity. In reality it only limited it. It taught him that out of Drayford he might be of small account. But among Drayford people he felt himself pre-eminent. Utter submission would have been Bella's safest weapon. She would never have been in such danger of his contempt as she was, thus defying him. He would have seen in her servility only a proof of superior sense.

His indecision was so momentary that Bella did

not even perceive it. His quick eyes roving round the room were attracted to little Milly, sitting lonely on a distant sofa. Had she been downright plain he would have used her to serve his purpose, but he was very well satisfied that his self-banishment from Bella's society, though probably wearisome, should not be so disagreeable as that. And thus it was that little Milly was destined to teach Miss Mannering how unwise it was to trifle with the great Mr Warburton.

So, politely acquiescing in Bella's refusal to sing (no sooner uttered than repented), he rose slowly from the easy-chair and strolled across to the little exile on the sofa. Milly's heart leapt up to meet him, and she could hardly believe her eyes. He was angry with Miss Mannering, of course. And indeed it seemed to Milly, though Bella *was* so very superior and beautiful, and as nearly worthy of Mr Warburton as any one could be, she had not behaved nicely that evening. But, the little girl reflected with a sigh, Mr Warburton's coming and sitting down, as if he meant to talk, was no good—he would soon be tired of *her*, she was so silly; and then he would go back to Bella, and it would be worse than if he had never come, for he would always think what a stupid little idiot Milly Hope was.

Still she could not help being pleased in spite of her gloomy forebodings, and her little heart throbbed tumultuously, and the wild-rose colour

came into her cheeks. There was a light in her soft grey eyes, and when she looked straight up into Mr Warburton's face they were frightened, rejoicing, and beseeching all at once. He must have understood them had he been a duller man. He was flattered, and it was a new kind of flattery, and he said to himself, "By Jove, the child is pretty after all!"

"The child" *was* pretty—singularly so when she grew excited and lost her shrinking awkward look. She had put on a dainty white-and-green dress, and had a green ribbon in her golden hair. The colour, unlike poor Bella's unchanging bloom, came and went in her cheeks at almost every word, and she had a pretty unconscious trick of drooping her long lashes till a remark was made, and then suddenly raising her eyes, brimming with light, to the speaker's face. Mr Warburton felt that his exile would not be intolerable.

It was necessary to get up an animated conversation lest any one should imagine him bored, so he set about his task. With Bella he tried to be brilliant, with little Milly he only wished to be gentle. And he succeeded admirably. He subdued his strong voice to its softest tones, he smiled his most encouraging smile, he listened kindly to every word she uttered, and she was soon chattering happily. But every now and then she flashed a quick shy glance of suspicion and inquiry into

Mr Warburton's face, like some slender little woodland creature, wild and timid and newly caught. But she found nothing but what tended to reassure her, and that from no deep-laid scheme on her companion's part, but simply because he really was good-natured and genial if he were suffered to have his own way. Milly was likely to meet with pleasant looks when she was feeding his vanity so pleasantly, and offering the incense of her admiration with so innocent a delight in her office.

Bella watched them with eyes at once sombre and brilliant. She was annoyed and disconcerted, slightly apprehensive, but not seriously so. She understood Mr Warburton's tactics, and though in her inmost heart she resented the lesson, she fully intended to profit by it. For that evening she must endure in silence; it was impossible to pursue her prey to his new retreat. Bella, after the first shock of astonishment and disgust, remembered herself, and directed her glances elsewhere. Yet the discomfited huntress knew perfectly well how the lordly animal, who had shaken himself at any rate partially free from her toils, was ostentatiously displaying his liberty, as, superb and sleek, he sunned himself in Milly's tremulous but triumphant glances.

For that evening she must endure, but when next they met she would effect a prompt recon-

ciliation, indulge in no more dangerous experiments, weave her bonds anew around Matthew, and triumph by submission.

She looked for some possible relenting in his face when he bade her good-night, though she hardly expected her punishment to be so quickly over. And it was not. If he had not met her glance, Bella would have taken it as a slightly favourable sign. But even that poor consolation was denied her. Mr Warburton looked straight into the face which she tried to keep perfectly calm, with eyes at once keen and indifferent. It was their first passage of arms, and Bella owned to herself that her antagonist was too strong for her, armed with his cool assurance and cased in his invulnerable vanity. She bit her lip as she saw him bid Milly good-night with a gracious look and meaning smile, and what she was certain was a lingering pressure of the shyly responsive little hand.

It was long before either of the rivals slept that night. Bella was kept awake by vexation at her own folly, sudden stabs of jealousy, and a cold terror lurking in her heart which she dared not clothe in words, and tried vainly to ignore. But Milly lay on her little white bed in a tumult of happiness, with throbbing pulses and bounding heart, pressing her soft hot cheeks on the cool pillow, and, fretted by her tangled hair, pushing

its great golden waves from her flushed face. With eager eyes she looked out, not into the dim night which surrounded her, but into a future which was a very fountain of sunlight. Nothing but the knowledge that only a very slight partition divided her from the head of Mrs Rivers's bed, kept her from breaking out in sweet, low, inarticulate singing like the warbling of a happy bird. "So kind, and oh, how handsome! So handsome, and oh how kind!"—was the burden of her thoughts as she fell asleep; and she took up the glad refrain when the morning sunlight bathed her in its earliest radiance, as if there had never been a pause in it at all. The child was as bewildered in her happiness as if to one who had had day-dreams of diamonds were suddenly flung the Koh-i-Noor.

Milly and Bella alike looked eagerly forward to their next meeting with Mr Warburton. Milly, in her happy hopefulness, was inclined to make it a final test. If he went back to his old allegiance, she would understand—how the little heart fluttered and sank at the mere idea!—that he had never really wavered in it. But if he came to her again—oh that sanguine, joyful "if"!—she would believe that he had cast the old bonds aside for ever. Naturally, therefore, she anticipated the great moment with a quivering intensity of expectation.

Bella, though anxious and excited, was more moderate alike in hope and fear. She did not undervalue the importance of the meeting, but she felt that it would not be absolutely decisive. If Matthew Warburton came back to her, she was fully determined that he should leave her side no more. She did not expect him to yield; all she wanted now was that he should give her an opportunity of yielding. If he went to Milly again without affording her the slightest chance of holding out the olive-branch, she would look upon the matter as serious, upon the gulf between them as dangerously wide; but she would not even then despair. She knew Matthew Warburton well enough to understand that, once offended, he would like to see the offender fairly in the dust at his feet before he granted his pardon. Bella would rather have liked the same thing herself. Could a sudden stroke of fortune have made her rich and independent, she would not have been thoroughly happy without Matthew Warburton. But she would dearly have liked to humble him first.

Tuesday evening came. Bella was superb in a flowing black silk—gleams of scarlet at her throat, and in her jet-black hair. She swept up the room, her queenly head thrown back, her great eyes flashing and dilated, her lips a little compressed. "Why, Bella, my dear, how magnificent you look to-night!" cried placid Mrs Rivers. So thinks little

Milly. *Her* fancies in the matter of dress are kept within proper bounds by her aunt, but she, too, has done her best to look well, wearing a dress of pale blue, which, lacking the silken lustre of Miss Mannering's, yet falls in softer and more graceful folds.

"Mr Warburton."

The Drayford hero advances, with his usual air of superb self-confidence, shakes hands with Mrs Rivers, shakes hands with Bella and the others, and turns to Milly with a smile and a glance which seem to link this meeting with the parting of two or three days before.

Bella turns away with a heart brimming with bitterness. Mr Warburton begins to talk to his hostess; but, from time to time, he appeals by word or look to happy Milly. Tea coming in makes matters rather worse. Milly is always her aunt's deputy at the urn, and Mr Warburton proves himself the most devoted of squires. Through the whole of that weary tea-time, Bella, putting a strong constraint upon herself, sat in apparently smiling indifference, and keenly studied her faithless admirer all the time. Was he acting a part, or was he—was it possible he could be?—in earnest in his new devotion? She could glean nothing from his face. And indeed it was not likely. Had she arrived at any definite certainty she would have been more advanced than Mr Warburton himself.

He was honestly not quite sure what he intended

or wanted. He was fascinated with the innocent frankness of his new love. He was strongly inclined to throw Miss Mannering over altogether, and—well, why shouldn't he marry little Milly? He might do worse. He did not mean to live and die a bachelor, and it was time to think of bringing a wife home to the pompous red-brick house in the High Street. Why not little Milly? Only, you see, his long flirtation with Milly's rival had made a certain impression upon him. Well, there was no hurry. And, meanwhile, there was one thing he saw plainly, that it could do no harm, and would certainly be pleasant to him, if, with Miss Hope's assistance, he gave Miss Mannering another lesson in manners.

I think I hear a chorus of young ladies' voices denouncing him as a brute.

A brute? No doubt he was, as the term is often used. Yet, was it altogether Mr Warburton's fault? For fifteen years he had been courted and worshipped in Drayford, and had he had a humble opinion *of* himself he must have had it all *to* himself. Had not Bella done much to foster the inordinate vanity and serene contempt which so humiliated her now?

He had received the worst possible training. It is true that no training, as far as one can see, could have made him an exalted specimen of humanity. His tastes were not refined—his feelings were not delicate. Not only had he no spark of the old

chivalrous spirit, but I cannot conceive the power which could have made him even understand its nature or believe that any man living could really be animated by it. Men were humbugs when they wrote or spoke in any different fashion to what he felt in his honesty. He had no reverence for women, nor, for that matter, much respect. Yet, after a fashion, he was honourable. What he considered the most important thing on the face of the earth was Matthew Warburton's word. I cannot imagine the temptation which would have induced him to swerve from that. Had he pledged it to Bella Mannering, little Milly, though she had been ten times as innocently attractive, could not have made him unfaithful for one moment. Unluckily it was only the absolute word, written or spoken, that he reverenced, and he did not in this case consider himself anything but a free man. Even Bella felt that she could hardly reproach him. A more delicate sense of honour might have felt something of a bond, but Mr Matthew Warburton arose and shook himself like Samson, and like Samson found himself unfettered. So he pondered, tending ever towards one decision.

Bella waited for her chance till after tea. She was occasionally a whist-player—Milly never. She determined to be one of the quartette that night, and fortune favoured her, for she was Matthew Warburton's partner. But it was all in vain. Her

glances, which of old could bring him from the other side of the room, now seemed to fall short even when darted across the card-table. She played well—he took it as a matter of course. She trumped his best card and he glanced indifferently at it, and then suffered his roving eyes to wander where Milly sat near the window, talking to the curate's wife, who hooked away at her crochet with a pleased smile on her faded face.

Mr Warburton, bringing his eyes back rather suddenly, caught something of the stormy blackness of Bella's watchful glance. He bent his face a little over the cards he was sorting, and hid a half-smile. "Amiable—very," he said to himself; "a nice sort of look to meet a man when he comes home in the evening." And he tossed down his first card, and flashed one quick glance to the group by the window again.

He joined it when the card-playing was over. Bella lingered by the table, absently turning up card after card, as if in some mysterious way she hoped to find her fortune written there. She felt helpless and rather hopeless. If Mr Warburton's glances had sought hers, even in malicious triumph, she would have welcomed them as indications that at any rate he thought of her. But they never did. He was either acting or feeling the most complete indifference.

Bella reached out her hand to one card which lay

a little apart from the rest, face downwards on the green cloth. She turned it up, and it was the Queen of Hearts. Was it an omen or a mockery? Bella looked fiercely at the painted simpering face, and the hand primly holding the invariable flower. "You are better off than I am," she thought. "At any rate, you've got the knave and king to play off against each other: I've only one, and I declare I don't know which he is; though I rather think—knave!"

She flung the fortunate queen down, and glancing after her saw that she lay among those already turned up, with the king at her feet. "Come," said Bella, bitterly, "there's Milly's fortune, at any rate."

Miss Mannering had naturally had enough of the cards since she read them in this gloomy fashion. She went across to Mrs Rivers, and joined in the conversation that lady was having with the curate.

Another evening of triumph for Milly. But when it was over, the little maiden was too tired to lie awake and think of her hero. She was rather ashamed of herself that her sleep was not even broken by any dreams of him.

Neither was the morrow without its share of happiness. Milly, going out for a walk, met Mr Warburton near the Rectory. He sauntered some little distance by her side, and then regretted when

he looked at his watch that he could not go any further. Milly regretted it too, as he parted from her with an unnecessarily lingering pressure of the hand. Nevertheless she went the rest of the way, feeling as if her heart and feet were so light that the one was in Paradise and the others scarcely touched the ground. Bella, gloomily looking from the Rectory window, thought the place of meeting had been purposely selected to torture her. She watched them in bitterness of heart. But I think her feelings would have been tenfold more bitter could she have known what was indeed the truth, that neither Matthew nor Milly had so much as remembered the fact of her existence.

Still there was to be one brief gleam of apparent sunshine for poor Bella. Sunday had come in the interval, bringing a fresh cup of humiliation for her reluctant lips. Mrs Rivers and Milly were both at church in the morning, and Mr Warburton was not. But in the afternoon Milly was alone in their pew, and Mr Warburton was in his; and service being over, he joined her in the porch, and in the sight of all the congregation walked home with her, carrying her prayer-book.

Bella had taken the organist's duty during his temporary absence; and as she stood rolling up her music and putting on her gloves, a meek little Drayford spinster came, and, after shaking hands with her and inquiring after her mamma (Mrs Man-

nering being an invalid), proceeded to inquire if there wasn't something between Mr Warburton and Milly Hope.

"Mamma is much as usual, thank you," said Bella, with a grandly lowering face. "As to Mr Warburton and Milly, I fear I cannot give you any information. It's not *my* business, and I am not their confidante. And I hardly think, Miss Wilkinson, that church is exactly the place——"

"Oh, my dear, no! My dear, I am very sorry—it was exceedingly thoughtless of me. I'm sure I beg your pardon."

"Not at all," said Bella, with undiminished stateliness. But the little spinster went away in a very unhappy frame of mind, and ready to burst out crying. To have been rebuked by the Rector's daughter for talking about such things *there*—it was dreadful—it was like incurring the censure of the Church! To think that Bella should have taken it *so!* But when poor little Miss Wilkinson came somewhat to herself, she drew her inferences pretty correctly from the fact that Bella had taken it *so;* and it was speedily the common talk of Drayford how "Mr Warburton had jilted Bella Mannering, and she was so mad about it she was ready to poison him and Milly Hope together."

Bella solemnly determined she would not go to Mrs Rivers's house again; but when the time came she could not stay away. Accordingly she went.

Mr Warburton came late, and whether anything of the rumours had reached him, and he wished to stop the flood of Drayford gossip a little, or whether Milly looked rather too triumphantly confident that he was coming to her, and he who had emancipated himself from Miss Mannering's tyranny did not choose to be paraded as a captive by "that child," as he had called her, certain it is that, his greetings over, he resumed his old place by Bella's side. Milly saw it with a sudden incredulous despair. He had not meant anything, then—he had liked Bella best all the time; she had been foolish, and he would laugh at her if he knew; and she hated him,—no, she loved him, and her dream was over, and her heart would break! She did not take her lesson even with Bella's fortitude. The very utmost she could do was to refrain from bursting into a flood of childish tears.

Bella was too doubtful to dare to be triumphant. She distrusted this tardy return, which had no warmth of reconciliation in it. She did her best, however, to welcome the truant. She tried to talk as in old times (only a fortnight before, though it seemed ages), but it was with a heart which sank lower and lower every minute. Formerly she had felt that he liked to talk to her, that he was amused and pleased: now, say what she would, she instinctively felt that she had not awakened his interest. She fought with the valour of a forlorn-

hope, but with the conviction that it was useless. She was not surprised when he answered absently, and his eyes went with a sort of pitying amusement to drooping little Milly.

It was very hard, Bella thought. She had loved Matthew so long, so very long. It was her last hope; and Milly had her life before her. And knowing nothing of the child's foolish secret worship, Miss Mannering supposed she had never thought of Mr Warburton till the evening he went across and sat by her side on the sofa. "Her vanity is flattered; she does not really love him," she thought; "the game is not utterly lost perhaps even now."

But I think she would have thrown up her cards could she have looked into Mr Warburton's heart, and understood the meaning of his serenely gracious smile. He had not known what he felt or wished at first. He had almost fancied that he cared for Bella, when really it was only that he was used to her. Her doom was sealed, and his heart pierced to the core, when Milly looked up into his face with her glad beseeching smile. He was dull in matters of feeling, and had not understood then, but he knew what he wanted clearly enough now; and meant to have it without more delay.

"Well, we may as well have our rubber, Dr Ford?" said Mrs Rivers. The Doctor bowed as-

sent. "And," she glanced irresolutely at Bella and Miss Wilkinson, "Bella, will you play?"

"I shall be very happy." (Miss Wilkinson was rather sorry. She liked playing whist with Doctor Ford.)

"And Mr Warburton—that will be——"

"Thank you, no," said Matthew. "I've been busy all day. I'm rather tired, and," he glanced at his watch, "I fear I must go early."

Bella was thunderstruck. The idea of such a calamity had never entered her head. However, there was no help for it. Miss Wilkinson took the vacant place readily enough. Bella could have cried with vexation and spite, but she controlled herself with a violent effort, and the game began.

Milly had heard Mr Warburton's refusal to play, and the woe-begone little face had brightened. But it clouded again when he lingered watching the first hand. Perhaps he would stay there looking at them a little while and then go. She was in an agony of hope and fear.

Card after card fell—would he *never* come away? Yes! yes! yes! he was coming, lounging across the room in his own superb style. The low chair by Milly's side creaked as he dropped into it, and she was in Paradise once more.

"You look very melancholy to-night," said the gentleman.

"No," and the little lady shook her head. "No —indeed."

Mr Warburton only smiled.

"Shall you have to go away very early?" she asked. It was the subject uppermost in her mind, and she could think of nothing else to say.

"Not very; unless I go for a moonlight walk."

"Oh—*are* you going?"

"Not that I know of."

Another "Oh!" and "What made you talk about it, then?"

"Because it's just the night for it if any one felt inclined."

"It's moonlight, then?" said Milly, looking across at the windows.

Mr Warburton laughed. "Why, of course it's moonlight—a splendid moon. "I say," lowering his voice, "what do you say, Milly—will you come out on the balcony and see, eh?"

Bella, wearily whist-playing, saw them cross the room and disappear behind the curtain. She would have cheerfully given ten years of her life to have been able to see beyond it. And if she had paid the price, and followed them, I think she would have cried out in utter bitterness of soul, "Take all the rest, and let me lie down at once!"

For the safe shelter scarcely reached, she would have seen a strong arm round a slender waist, a

slight form which, swaying, yielded as it was drawn, and a proud head bent to whisper what, for manner, might have been a royal declaration of love. Milly answered it neither by word nor look, only drew a little closer to her lover's side. But when, in answer to his pleadings, the golden-haired head was raised a little, the delicate flower-like lips and cheeks were pressed to the handsome black-whiskered face which was stooping over her.

It soon went back, leaning on Mr Warburton's elaborate shirt-front as if that were its natural resting-place. And then Milly whispered . . . No; I won't tell you what she said. It's no business of yours. And if she talked nonsense Mr Warburton set her the example, and he was old enough to know better. So if you like to blame him you may, though I shall not join even in that, for I think Mr Matthew Warburton never did a wiser thing in his life than he did in that five minutes on the balcony.

(By the way, there was something I wanted to say about that moon, for I like to be accurate. Milly thought it was "lovely," and Mr Warburton, as we know, described it as "splendid." But I do not myself think it was very remarkable; in fact I should have said not full, and certainly a little misty. We have all seen the moon shedding such a flood of keen radiance that the landscape seems

to wear a veil of transparent snow. But on this occasion there was nothing of the kind. I really think the utmost that could be said for it would be that it was like Mr Birdofredum Sawin's star, "a middlin' shiny one." But then I did not view it from that balcony.)

Mrs Rivers's gilt clock ticked steadily, totally ignoring the fact that outside the window the minutes, marked by fond whispers and beating hearts, were going like lightning; while within, measured by the monotonous fall of the cards on the green cloth, they dragged wearily on.

Matthew was stroking Milly's rippling hair, and with all the soul he possessed looking into her eyes. She drew her face a little away, and laid her soft cheek against his hand in a mute caress.

"I must go now, Milly," he said.

And Milly said, "Please — *please.*" Can you wonder that after so eloquent and convincing a speech Mr Warburton should have remained at least ten minutes longer? But at last he did go. Parting from her with a long embrace, kissing the soft lips and the tremulous eyelids and the little hands, he withdrew the curtain for a moment, stepped into the drawing-room, and walked coolly up to the card-players.

"Good-night, Mrs Rivers — I'm off," he said. She took her eyes from the king of trumps for a moment, and returned his "Good-night:" "Good-

night, Ford — you won't walk home with me, I suppose?"

"Thank you, no," said the gaunt serious doctor; "I must finish my game."

"Yours takes some time to play," said Matthew; "Good-night, Miss Wilkinson." Then he looked over Bella's hand: "Well, Miss Mannering, and are *you* playing your cards pretty successfully?"

Seeing that Mr Matthew Warburton knew perfectly well that for his sake, and his only, Bella had joined the game, and while she was thus cruelly trapped, he had been making love to her rival a few yards away, it was a mean and ungenerous speech. The man who loved Milly, and whom Milly loved, *ought* to have been incapable of finding pleasure in pricking sensitive Bella with a taunting little jest. But he was not. I am more angry with him for that, I think, than for anything else.

"I don't know," the girl replied, with a flash in her lowering eyes; "some games are only played for amusement, and one does not trouble one's self about the end."

"Oh, is that it?" said Matthew; "well, so much the better if you are losing—it sounds rather like a loser's speech;" and he held out his hand, which she just touched with the tips of her reluctant fingers—and so he departed.

Little Milly watched her opportunity, stole across from the window, and went silently to her own room. When they had finished their game, the whist-players heard that Miss Hope was tired, and had gone to bed.

The truth was, she did not want to talk that night. She even made up her mind to pretend to be sound asleep when her aunt should come in to kiss her. The dreadful hypocrite rehearsed a little beforehand, and did it very well—so naturally, indeed, that she had done the real thing long before Mrs Rivers came in with her carefully-shaded candle.

All this happened in May, and it was now nearly the end of September. Every one in Drayford knew the result of that evening's inspection of the moon. The Mannerings had been ten weeks at Brighton, and were just home again. "Bella looked better for her change," the gossips said. She was statelier than ever, but had a tired look about her eyes, and her temper was a little uncertain, — sometimes very gentle, so that its sad humility seemed out of harmony with her queenly bearing—sometimes fretful and sullen.

Mrs Rivers was sorry for the disappointed girl, and Bella seemed to bear no malice, but came and went as of old. To Milly she was less variable than to others, almost always kind, but with a certain coldness, keeping her, and, still more, Matthew, at arm's-length

Mrs Rivers might be sorry for Bella, but she could not help being glad that her niece was provided for. She could leave the child something when she died, but the larger part of her income would revert to her husband's family, and Milly was her sister's daughter. So, apart from her liking for Mr Warburton, she was naturally pleased that her little girl should have secured the best match in Drayford.

Nevertheless she had at first objected to a positive engagement. She hoped Milly knew her own mind, and would not change; still she had a feeling that the helpless motherless girl ought to have a certain amount of freedom secured to her. "She is too young," urged Mrs Rivers to the imperious and impatient wooer—"only seventeen last February—she is too young to be married—too young to pledge herself finally. You must give her time."

Mr Warburton did not see that, and tried to put Mrs Rivers down with a strong hand. But the placid lady proved surprisingly obstinate. Then he changed his tactics, and made concessions with an immense amount of fuss and parade. Mrs Rivers accepted them gratefully, and discovered, too late, that he had hardly yielded anything at all.

Milly's birthday was the 19th. Mr Warburton suggested that there could be no possible objection to their marriage then. "Lent," said Mrs Rivers.

Matthew gulped down a strong word about Lent. "Well, then," he said, "as soon after Easter as could be managed." After a prolonged debate, Mrs Rivers yielded. If, when the New Year came, Milly had not changed her mind, it might be considered a settled thing. "And if she does, I'm to grin, and bear it, eh?" said Mr Warburton. "Yes," said Mrs Rivers, looking up with a smile at the jolly handsome face; "you must grin, and bear it." Matthew said it was very hard.

Milly thought it was extremely absurd when she was told of it, and was rather indignant on Matthew's account. "As if I could ever change," she had whispered—"as if I could ever change!"

And Mr Warburton tossed his head slightly back, with a broad smile of pleasure at her words, and amusement at Mrs Rivers's folly. "My dear girl, do you suppose I was afraid?" "I never will," she persisted; "Matthew, I never will!" And that was how they settled the question of Milly's freedom.

Mrs Rivers had gathered up all her energy for her one protest, and that being made, she drifted on in her usually placid passive way. As she sincerely wished for the match, and as she thought her niece really did seem to be sure of herself, she only faintly remonstrated when Mr Warburton altogether ignored their covenant, and behaved on every occasion as if it were already a settled

and positive thing. Indeed, after a few weeks the original treaty was almost totally forgotten. Bella perhaps remembered it. And Milly used merrily to threaten her big lover now and then, that if he wasn't very good she would change her mind before New Year's Day. At which capital joke they both invariably laughed.

As I have said, the summer was ebbing fast. It was the end of September, and stray leaves began to flicker softly from the trees, the freshness of all verdure was gone, and the fields were grey stubble which had been golden corn. When next the summer came round, Milly thought, as she looked out at the warm, rich, yet mournful autumn landscape—when next the leaves came out and the flowers bloomed, she would be married. Before the little copses were blue with hyacinths—but she would have time to go and pick some primroses as Milly Hope, and then—did married ladies ever go out and pick primroses, she wondered? She rather thought not. And of course she would go out for walks with Matthew then, and she did not think he ever picked wild flowers. Well, she would have a last scramble in the Drayford woods, get a last nosegay from the hedgerows, and from the height of her approaching dignity and happiness look back with that mixture of scorn and pity and yearning to the simple childhood which had passed away for ever. Milly thought of it as if it were

some little old-fashioned frock or ornament, once dearly prized, now altogether outgrown, absurd, impossible to put on, yet regarded a little sadly and tenderly by the young fashionably-dressed lady, who felt with a curious kind of pain that, though the world was before her and a thousand changes might come, there was one that could never be. Never could she change again into the simple artless little creature who knew no passion either of joy or sorrow, who loved her aunt and her nurse-maid, and later, her governess, and liked to have bread and treacle for her tea. No, Milly reflected, half smiling, half sighing, all that was over for ever.

She had been very happy through the past summer—passionately, triumphantly, excitedly happy. Mr Warburton's future wife was an important personage in Drayford. Milly had been caressed and made much of where of old she had been ignored. And Matthew's good temper had been unvarying. Never had she seen the faintest flash of displeasure in his eyes except once, when he took it into his obstinate head that some one had slighted her. Then indeed he had raged, and Milly had had to soothe him with many innocent little artifices. But a woman delights in a lion-like fierceness, if to her the lion is a lamb.

But—I verily believe that word "but" was made to come in at the end of descriptions of felicity—

there was one tiny flaw in Milly's great happiness. She had not the slightest doubt that Mr Matthew Warburton was the first and highest of men. Indeed she considered him an absolutely perfect man. But she wished men in general could be altered in one or two little things.

Matthew Warburton since that moonlight night petted her, fondled her, loaded her with presents, but did not see that he was bound to be *polite* to her. He had no natural courtesy; his politeness was donned for company; it was irksome and chilling to him, so that of course it was flung aside when he was with his future wife. Milly could not have defined what it was pained her, but something jarred upon her finer feelings. It was a pleasure to wait on her lord and master in little ways, and yet she was angry with herself because of a certain irritation which she felt in so waiting. Mr Warburton took such attentions as a matter of course, and saved his politeness for other young ladies, while he gave his love to Milly.

After all, do not we see a good many husbands who do exactly the same? Unreasonable little Milly, to want both love and courtesy.

I remember hearing once how the principle was thoroughly carried out at a young mechanic's wedding. The bride came with one bridesmaid, both decked out in what finery they could manage. The ceremony being over, and the names duly

signed in the vestry, the bridegroom, with the greatest politeness, offered his arm, not to the bride, but to the bridesmaid, and conducted her out of church. Of course he preferred his wife, who came meekly at the couple's heels, but then she *was* his wife, and the other was a strange young lady, and as such entitled to the benefit of his company manners.

Matthew Warburton was guided by the same feeling, though it was hardly probable he would follow it out so logically. Milly supposed it was natural to all men, and that Dr Ford's prim little pink-faced assistant was free and easy with the young lady at Birmingham.

The last Tuesday in that September Bella Mannering made her appearance in Mrs Rivers's drawing-room. And following Bella Mannering came a young man.

A grave, quiet young man, who had a pale face and a thoughtful manner, and who stood silently by Miss Mannering while she explained that they had met Mr Eversley at Brighton, and he was staying with them for a few days, and they were sure Mrs Rivers wouldn't mind. . . . And Mrs Rivers hastened to assure her that not only did she not mind, but that she was charmed to make Mr Eversley's acquaintance, and the pair shook hands. A general introduction followed, and everybody looked curiously at Mr Eversley, and Mr Eversley looked at

every one a little absently. He was not shy, only very quiet. He talked readily enough, in a voice which, though very pleasant, was extremely low. After a while he found himself near Milly as she sat at the tea-table. Mr Warburton had not yet arrived, and the little tea-maker was rather solitary. Perhaps even dull Drayford folks had discovered that young ladies who are waiting for their lovers are not the liveliest of company. It would have been unreasonable to expect a sparkling flow of small-talk from Hero, for instance, when with straining eyes she looked out across the waves. But Mr Eversley was not aware of any tie between Milly and Mr Warburton, nor indeed of that gentleman's existence; so, bravely approaching her where she sat intrenched behind the big tray, he offered his services if he could be of any use.

Six months earlier Milly would have been confused and bewildered, but the engaged young lady was rather more self-possessed. "Oh, thank you," she said, "you might give me those cups."

He did. Then he filled up the teapot for her. "Aunt Rivers will not have the tea brought into the room and handed round; she likes to see it made," said Milly.

"Don't you?" said Mr Eversley, as he tried to see through the steam whether the teapot was full. "I think it is much nicer."

"Only no one does it now," said Milly.

"Which makes us appreciate your kindness the more. Why are you so anxious to be exactly like everybody else?"

Under her directions he fetched and carried several cups for the assembled spinsters and dowagers. But after a time, the demand for tea and cake and thin bread-and-butter having subsided, he sat down by Milly and began to talk.

Seeing him more closely, she presently made the discovery that Mr Eversley was by no means so young as she had imagined from her first glance at his beardless face. Probably the candle-light had helped the brief illusion. Now that he was so near her, Milly saw that he was somewhat worn—that there were faint suggestions of hollows in cheek and temple, and "a lot of tiny little wrinkles," as she said to herself, at the corners of the bright gentle eyes. But he had a quantity of soft brown hair, which he wore rather too long to be fashionable, and the smooth silken waves looked very youthful indeed.

Mr John Eversley had a pleasant though rather a melancholy face. He seemed marked out by nature as a sort of amateur father confessor. You felt a curious impulse to tell him all your secrets when you looked at the soft inquiring eyes, the mouth formed for gentlest speech if speech were needed, if not, for kindly silence, and whose lips seemed incapable of laugh or sneer.

He was the son of a clergyman named Lisle. He had gone out to India as a young man, and had come back after two years, so ill he was hardly expected to live. Wandering to and fro in his aimless, gentle way on the parade at Ventnor, the young fellow had attracted the attention of a solitary old officer who was also wintering there. Colonel Eversley made inquiries about John Lisle; found he had known his uncle in old times; introduced himself to the young man; was fascinated by him, as every one was who knew him; made John move from his lodgings to the house where he had established himself; planned tours in which his new friend was to be his companion; and finally, when the spring-time came, and Lisle began to talk about going away, and, since his health was a little re-established, seeking something to do, it appeared that Colonel Eversley could not part with him. "I'm all alone in the world," he said. "I buried my boy seventeen years ago, and he was the last of all. You had better stay with me, John, and take his place. No one has any claim on me. What do you say? Can you put up with a fretful, fidgety old fellow, eh?"

John thought he could. Mr Lisle, who was anything but a rich man, and who had mourned over his boy's dark prospects, looked upon the wealthy Colonel Eversley as a messenger sent by Providence to rescue John from his perplexities. It was

not like waiting for dead men's shoes, either. Young Lisle stepped at once into the pleasant position of the Colonel's son. The old man took every opportunity of making it clearly understood among his acquaintance that his young friend would inherit every shilling he had to leave—no inconsiderable fortune.

So the two had roamed about in France and Italy. John almost worshipped the old Colonel, and felt a son's sorrow when he laid his adopted father in the grave. Perhaps no clause in the will gave him more pleasure than that which bound him to assume the name of Eversley.

He had met the Mannerings at Brighton, and had made friends with the Rector. When they asked him down to Drayford, being an idle man, he came. But he hesitated a little before he accepted the invitation. He wished to please Mr Mannering, who was evidently anxious he should come. He had never been at Drayford, but he had an unpleasant remembrance of its name.

Before he went to India a situation had been found for his only brother in the Drayford Bank.

Owing to some negligence on the part of one of his superiors, the young man, who was terribly in debt, had been sorely tempted and had fallen. Of course he intended to make all right. Equally of course, he could not. His ruin was imminent, nay, inevitable. But a friend to whom he confessed

his madness contrived to save him from its darkest consequences. His generous help and strenuous exertions were in a great measure successful. The matter was hushed up, and young Lisle went away. People knew there was something mysterious about his sudden departure; but though there were many rumours there was no certainty, and the talk died out in time.

It was all over when John came home ill. George had gone to Canada, the generous friend had been repaid—only Mr Lisle knew at what cost, for he buried the secret of his younger son's misdeeds in even more than his accustomed silence. John knew that something had gone very wrong during George's stay at Drayford, but had never chosen to ask for particulars which must be as painful for him to hear as for his father to relate.

It was the remembrance of this old trouble which had made John hesitate about accepting Mr Mannering's urgent invitation. But he did not hesitate long. "I can do no harm," he reflected; "the whole thing is gone by—*was* gone by before ever the Mannerings went there. Nothing about me can in any way recall my brother to people's minds—we are not a bit alike,"—his thoughts flashed from his melancholy reflection in the mirror to a bright fair florid face; "and as to names, no one will have the least reason for supposing Mr John Eversley to be related to Mr George Lisle. I'll go." And

thus it came to pass that he found himself by Milly's tea-table that September evening.

He talked softly and fluently about books and music, and after a time slid into a description of some of his travels; but it was curious to note, whatever the subject, how rarely he said "I,"—it was always "a friend of mine," or "the people at such a place." Milly listened, well pleased, but as she listened she looked from time to time at the door. It opened at last and her lover appeared. John stopped in the middle of a sentence to follow the direction of her eager eyes. His own rested on the big handsome man who was replying in a great jovial voice to a buzz of greetings. They lingered on Mr Warburton's face for a moment, and then were turned away full of a faint but decided antipathy.

Mrs Rivers, probably doubting whether her niece would ever make her old and new friends properly known to each other, came to the tea-table with the banker, and a formal introduction ensued—Mr Eversley — Mr Warburton. The two men bowed and exchanged greetings and glances. Mr Warburton was loftily indifferent, Mr Eversley was reserved and chilling.

Milly looked radiantly up into Matthew's face, "You are very late." He smiled and whispered something John did not hear. "Sit down," Miss Hope continued, "and let me pour you out some nice weak tepid tea."

"Thanks," said Mr Warburton; "I think I won't have any if it's cold."

"Oh, but it isn't really—at least I hope not. I shall give you a cup—you needn't drink it if you don't like it."

"Trust me for that," said he.

So it was duly poured out, and Mr Warburton, who was leaning lazily back in his chair by Milly's side, had it handed to him, and was particular about the amount of cream, and fanciful as to the exact strength of the tea. Then there arose a discussion on the subject of sugar. Mr Warburton averred that he had watched the proceedings from the beginning, and she hadn't given him a morsel. The little tea-maker as stanchly asserted, with an astonished "Oh, Matthew!" that she had. "You won't like it if you get too much," she said. "Taste it and see."

"Not a bit," said Mr Warburton confidently, after going through that ceremony; "not the least taste of it." And then he informed the company in general that Milly was putting him on an allowance of sugar already, and wasn't it a hard case?

"Oh, Matthew! Oh, what nonsense!" cried Milly, but stopped abruptly, for she encountered Mr John Eversley's brown eyes fixed on her with an expression of cold gentle wonder. The colour rushed painfully to her cheeks, and with a sudden

feeling of humiliation she caught the cup out of Matthew Warburton's hand, and tumbled two or three lumps of sugar into it in breathless haste. For about a minute she hated Mr Eversley.

"Come," said Mr Warburton, as his cup was restored to him by his flushed unwilling Hebe, almost as hurriedly as it had been snatched away, "let's see what it's like now." He sipped it and looked up with an amused smile: "Well, Milly, when you *do* make concessions it's in a liberal spirit, and no mistake. Thank you, my dear girl," holding out the cup for her to set down, "I've had plenty."

Then she was distressed. She wanted him to have some more, but he would not. Repenting of her haste, she said, in an anxious whisper, "You're not vexed with me, are you, Matthew?" To which he returned a loftily good-humoured smile and shake of the head, and after a minute went across to Mrs Rivers.

"Who is that fellow?" he asked.

"Why, that's Mr Eversley."

"Thank you very much; only you told me as much as that when you introduced us."

"Bella Mannering brought him. He is staying at the Rectory. Very well off, I believe. They met him at Brighton."

Warburton looked very knowingly from Bella to John Eversley, and when Mrs Rivers left him he mused for a moment with a well-pleased smile.

"Hooked some one else, has she? Well, better luck to you this time, Miss Bella. I hope you'll land him. I don't particularly admire your taste" —he glanced at the slim, melancholy gentleman by the tea-table—"at least not your *present* taste. Still, that's your look-out, not mine." He had been sorry for Bella, and though he had repeatedly assured himself, and indeed believed, that he was in no wise guilty of any faithlessness towards her, he was sincerely glad to see a prospect of happiness for her in this new direction. "We must make Drayford pleasant for Mr Eversley, and give the girl as good a chance as we can," Mr Warburton soliloquised in his kindness. "The Rectory must be awfully dull. Old Mannering is a prosy old bore, if ever there was one, and Mrs Mannering's worse, with her continual ailments. And this fellow doesn't look the sort to get on much with young Arthur. No—we must see what we can do, for Bella's sake. Poor Bella!"

Poor Bella, indeed! I verily believe that, could she have known of the amiable schemes he was meditating, she would have assaulted him then and there, as he stood on the hearth-rug, big, handsome, and absolutely beaming with patronising benevolence. That he of all men should plan her happiness with another! However, she knew nothing, and only watched him from a distance, as she often watched him now, with none of the old bitter-

ness, but a sort of grey hopeless calm, a very treacherous calm. And after a minute or two Mr Warburton walked back to the tea-table to put his good resolutions into practice at once.

The couple he had left there had been considerably embarrassed during his absence. Milly was painfully conscious of the look of wondering incredulity with which Mr Eversley had seen the bond between herself and Matthew. She was ashamed that it should have made any impression on her. John perceived that he had betrayed himself, and was uneasily trying to divine Milly's thoughts, and very much vexed at the remembrance of his unguarded glance. They were drifting into a laborious and disjointed conversation, most unlike their former one, when Mr Warburton returned, radiantly affable.

He set to work to make himself agreeable to the new-comer in his most genial manner. His overtures were received very courteously by Mr Eversley, who could not be uncivil, but with a gentle coldness, which made Milly say to herself, "He does not like him. *Why* does he not like him?" What did it signify? And yet she was pained.

When the rubber was made up that evening Mr Warburton volunteered to play. He did so purely out of kindness. He would far rather have lounged on the sofa or on the balcony with Milly. But then probably Mr Eversley would have been

pressed into the service, and Bella would have been left disconsolate; so he went away to the card-table, and Bella Mannering came across to the two whom he had left. And while the seniors played whist, these three young people talked. Bella, who was in good spirits that night, was very droll about some of their adventures at Brighton, and especially about an accident to Mr Mannering's hat, which had been the occasion of their first speaking to Mr Eversley, and had led to the discovery that he was the paragon of whom the Colonel had written so enthusiastically to his old friend the Rector of Drayford. "It ought to have been yours," he said; "it would have been much more romantic."

"Like a novel," said Milly; and she thought to herself that her new acquaintance would have done for one of the characters in a novel. Not the handsome muscular hero, of course (Milly looked across at the group round the card-table), but one of the pensive poetical people, who are always grave and gentle, and have secret sorrows gnawing at their hearts. Had Mr Eversley a secret sorrow gnawing at *his* heart? Milly was forced to allow that if he had he concealed it fairly well; for, seconded by Bella, he was in a quiet way making himself extremely amusing. There was not much in John Eversley perhaps. He floated lazily on the surface of life—was observant, though not keenly so—

fairly well read in the literature of the day, though rather as a clever woman is well read—but was not very remarkable for anything, except a courtesy which with him was almost a religion, and which, perhaps, was the more easily practised because he had no crotchets or theories. Milly was so unaccustomed to anything like his chivalrous deference that it perplexed and fascinated her. She liked Mr Eversley, yet she felt angry with him when the whist was over, and Matthew came and sat down by her side. But why should that make her feel out of temper with Mr Eversley? It was unreasonable.

When everybody went away Milly looked after him as he stood aside for Bella to pass, and followed her down-stairs. Then she turned and found Mr Warburton looking at her as he lay back in an arm-chair with his hands clasped above his head.

"What a clever child it is!" he said; "she has positively found it out!"

"Positively found what out?" said Milly, wonderingly.

Matthew sat up and burst out laughing. "Why, she positively hasn't! Mrs Rivers, do you hear? Come here, child, and let me enlighten you. Come here."

Milly came, but with a novel sense of reluctance. Did Mr Warburton usually speak in such a loud imperious tone?

"Why, Milly, where are your eyes? Don't you know what Mr John Eversley has come for?"

"No," said Milly; "what?"

"Well, do you want Bella for your bridesmaid? Because if you have set your heart on it, just tell your aunt you're dying to be married, and get her to give in. I am so naturally amiable that I shan't mind obliging you by making my appearance in church whenever you like. A couple of days' notice, Milly, to get the licence, that's all I ask, and then we'll be off to Paris for our honeymoon—eh, Mrs Warburton?"

She put her hand over his mouth—"Don't—what do you mean? Is Bella going to marry Mr Eversley?"

"She has literally and absolutely found it out. Yes, my dear Milly, you've exactly hit it," he said, with a meaning look. "Bella *is* going to marry Mr Eversley. Her intentions are remarkably evident."

Milly sat musing.

"Don't you think his are too?" said Mrs Rivers. "How devoted he looked as he squired her downstairs!"

"Oh yes, I think he's caught," Mr Warburton replied, with his broad smile. "A spoony sort of fellow, I should say."

"But a nice gentlemanly young man, I thought," urged kindly Mrs Rivers, "though he does seem rather shy and quiet."

"Oh yes, gentlemanly enough, I daresay. Bella will have her own way, you may be sure; and as she is particularly fond of that, she'll be particularly fond of him, I've no doubt."

"Don't you be hard on Bella," said Mrs Rivers. "We know some one who is very fond of *his* own way—don't we, Milly?"

The girl was a little startled by the sudden appeal, and hesitated a moment before she nodded a laughing assent.

"Milly was in a brown study. Now, Milly, since you've given me a character for having my own way, I'll deserve it. I insist on knowing what you were thinking about."

"I don't know."

"But I want to know. Was it deep grief at the idea of losing Bella?"

"No," said Milly, with a smile; "I think I shall get over that."

"Then you've fallen in love with Mr Eversley and want him yourself. Milly," in a tragic voice, "confess the truth."

Milly laughed. "What would you do?"

"Shoot him and commit suicide, of course. Could I do less?"

"And I shall be left with neither of you," said Milly, pensively. "Well, if you will be so unkind and inconsiderate," she looked up into the bold eyes and florid handsome face, "I think I will keep you."

The sentence was finished in his ear, for Matthew drew her down to him. "I *know* I will keep you, Milly, for ever and ever." He was not a man to be trifled with—this Mr Warburton. If he were angry one would fancy that some savage animal looked out of his eyes. He was not angry now, but the mere idea of any one's robbing him of little Milly gave him a menacing look.

It vanished as Milly laid her soft cheek on his shoulder and began to play with his watch-guard. There was silence for some minutes.

"Time for you to be off, Milly," Mrs Rivers said at last.

"For 'Milly' read 'Matthew,' and it will apply equally well," said the banker.

"Don't go yet—it isn't late," was the whispered remonstrance.

"I must. Why, you're half asleep already. Come down and see me off."

She did so. As he struggled into his big rough coat—for although it was but the end of September the nights were chilly—he bade her make haste and get to bed as soon as he should be gone. "And don't go and dream of Eversley, Milly, for my sake and Bella's."

She laughed. "I'm not likely."

He stooped and kissed her in his superbly patronising fashion. "Good child," he said. Then as she held the door open for him and peeped out

into the starry night, he lingered on the threshhold.

"This time next year, Milly, you won't be turning me out in this style, eh?"

"No," said Milly.

"Why, we shall be old married folks by then! Milly, I should like to catch you up and carry you off. What a good-natured fellow I must be not to do something violent to your aunt for not letting us have our own way—don't you think so? You'd come pretty soon if she'd let you, I know—wouldn't you, my darling?"

"Ask me next New-Year's Day," said Milly. "Good night." And with a laugh he went.

Half an hour earlier Mr John Eversley had walked down the silent street along which the banker was striding now, and he had said to Bella Mannering, "Miss Hope is engaged to Mr Warburton."

"Well, yes," said Bella. "At least I suppose it may be considered pretty well settled now, though it isn't really a positive engagement."

"Not a positive engagement," he repeated after her. "What is it, then?"

"Well, Milly may change her mind if she likes," Bella explained with a faint smile. "Mrs Rivers thought she was too young to bind herself, I believe."

"I should think so," said John Eversley, with

the same soft coldness in his voice. "Surely she is quite a child?"

"Nearly eighteen."

"Probably she has lived in Drayford all her life," said John.

"Since she was six or seven years old—her father died then."

"And her mother?"

"Died when she was a baby."

"Poor child!" said John. "An orphan—never having seen or known anything beyond this little town, and deciding her destiny before she understands it. Poor child!"

"Every one thinks it a good match, I believe."

John's silence was very full of meaning.

"And she is very fond of him," Bella continued.

"And that is just it," said he. "Fond of him—yes, of course she is fond of him. If she has seen no one else, of course she makes him her standard. Suppose she gets her eyes opened any time during the next five years and finds herself bound to that man and Drayford for ever."

"You don't like Mr Warburton?"

"Not much," said John; "but," with a start and glance at Bella, "perhaps he is a friend of yours?"

"Well, yes," said Miss Mannering, frankly. "But it was my fault; I should not have asked the question, only just then I was thinking more of Milly."

"I beg your pardon, I'm sure," said Eversley.

"Had I remembered he might be your friend, I would never have said a word."

"No matter," said Bella. "As you would have thought the same, it is just as well to say it, isn't it?"

"I could hardly agree to that," was John's reply; "and it does not bear on this question, for I should not have thought the same."

"What difference could it make?"

"If I had remembered he might be your friend, I should have doubted my hasty judgment. If I had known it, I should have been sure I was wrong."

(John meant what he said, only when he talked of "a friend of yours," he was thinking more of Mr Mannering than of Bella. If the shrewd gentlemanly old Rector liked Mr Warburton, no doubt there was good in Mr Warburton. But, as it happened, the Rector did not share his daughter's liking, but thought him a noisy conceited fellow, and quietly avoided him if it were possible.)

"I suppose, then," said Bella, "you are reconciled to Milly's fate?"

"By no means," was his quick rejoinder. "I am willing to allow—or rather I'm sure—that his faults are on the surface. But they are not suited to each other. He is too domineering; he will crush all individuality out of her. He treats her like a baby: she is his plaything—nothing more."

"That's true," said Bella.

"His wife should be a woman who would not be afraid of him."

"I think so too," his companion assented.

"Miss Hope is not clever, perhaps,' he went on, "but I am sure she could appreciate;—a talent about as useful to her if she marries Mr Warburton as a latent love of the fine arts to an Esquimaux."

Bella smiled. "Well, she may change her mind before Easter."

"Easter! Is she to be married at Easter?"

"I believe so,"—and the subject was dropped.

I am perfectly certain that any moderately-experienced novel-reader knows the occurrences of the next few days as well as I do. I have brought Milly's little story to a point at which it may be suffered to drift on for a little space. Let us suppose rather more than three weeks to have passed, and then take up the threads of these four or five lives again.

They are terribly knotted and perplexed, almost as if some malicious elf had got at the loom in which our little girl's fate was being woven with the others, in and out in a nice, neat, symmetrical pattern, and tossed and twisted them all in the maddest confusion. What is this? Milly's thread of glistening whiteness tangled with the soft, sad-coloured line which marks Mr John Eversley's fate? This will never do. But who is to unravel this

perplexity, so that it may neither be roughly broken nor its brightness soiled? I think it needs more penetrating eyes, and fingers more gently skilful, than those of Mr Matthew Warburton.

That gentleman and Mrs Rivers, anxious to be kind to Miss Mannering, had made Mr Eversley cordially welcome. The banker was seldom with Milly during the day-time; and Mrs Rivers, who daily expected the announcement of John and Bella's engagement, was very glad to leave the three young people to amuse themselves together as often as Miss Mannering liked to call, bringing her devoted squire. This she seemed very pleased to do, and the trio were together almost every day, either in Mrs Rivers's drawing-room practising singing (they suddenly discovered that their voices went charmingly together), or else they fetched Milly away for a ramble in the fields, or to play croquet in the Rectory garden. The end of which was, that John Eversley, in spite of resolutions and the stings of an uneasy conscience, fell madly in love with Milly Hope.

And Milly innocently thought that he belonged to Bella, and was always afraid she might be in the way. She liked him very much indeed. She thought him a miracle of kindness and cleverness, and was often haunted when she was alone by the memory of those bright, gentle, brown eyes. Yet she could not understand why the knowledge of

John Eversley had brought with it a novel feeling of doubt and unrest; why was she so uncertain and troubled—now unreasonably gay, then as unreasonably depressed?

You have seen a child asleep, half awakened by some one bending over it, lamp in hand. It stirs uneasily, murmurs confusedly, reaches out its hands, almost lifts the drooping lashes. There is a moment's suspense, ending either with a start and full consciousness, or the hands fall again, the cheek is pressed anew on the pillow, and the slumber, if anything, is deeper than before.

John Eversley had let in a gleam of light from the outer world on Milly's dream of love for Warburton. As yet she was not awakened; she still believed that her heart was as entirely given to Matthew as when Eversley's eyes first met her own. But it seemed barely possible that the catastrophe could be much longer delayed, almost miraculous that it had not already occurred. A word or a glance, and Milly must surely wake to a sense of the coarse and common nature of her idol, and see the difference between his violent yet half-contemptuous love, and John's simple devotion.

Bella Mannering had seen it all. At first she stood aside, and suffered events to take their course. If Mr Eversley was always wanting to be at Mrs Rivers's house on some pretext or other, she would not hinder him. He and Milly might do as they

pleased. She would never betray them to Mr Warburton, but it was not her duty to guard his interests. If Milly was free, Bella supposed she might flirt with Mr Eversley; if not, Mr Warburton had better come and look after her.

But as the days slipped by, Bella grew fonder and fonder of the innocent rival who had robbed her of her prize. She had begun by being a contemptuous spectator; she ended by feeling a purer and sweeter interest in Eversley's passion than in her own bygone desires. She would not seek Milly's confidence lest she should involve the girl in any difficulty. Neither did John ever tell her the story of his love, but she understood and sympathised with him, and he knew it. She was honest, though possibly she might remember at times that his success might prove to be hers also, if she could care for so pitiful a triumph.

Eversley felt that his stay at Drayford could not be indefinitely prolonged, and had been for a considerable time talking of departure. But every suggestion had been met by the Rector with eager remonstrances. Again and again had his visitor yielded, but he felt none the less that when a visit of a day or two had lasted a month, it must be drawing to a close.

Breakfast was over at the Rectory, and Mr Mannering had gone to his study. John leant against the window, looking out.

"Was that Arthur went by?" asked Bella.

"Yes—in a hurry apparently."

"Papa spoke to him last night, so I suppose he is out of temper, and we shan't see any more of him to-day." She gave a quick little sigh: "What are you going to do?"

"Rather—what are *you* going to do? Are we to have a walk this morning?"

"I should like it very much, but I can't go yet. I have these lists to copy out for papa."

"Can I help you?" turning round quickly.

"No, I don't think you can. I shan't be very long. Suppose you go and fetch Milly: if we go to the wood, it will be all out of our way to go to Mrs Rivers's first."

John's face, which was turned to the window again, brightened suddenly, and he went off on his errand as light-hearted as a schoolboy who has just got an unexpected holiday; and being shown up into the drawing-room, he found Milly alone.

"I am Miss Mannering's ambassador," he hastened to say. "We are going to see that remarkably beautiful wood you were both talking about a day or two since, and she wants to know if you will come with us."

Milly's face fell. "Oh, I should like, but I can't. Aunt has promised to lunch and spend the day at Mrs Thorne's."

John's disappointment was manifest. "What time must you go?"

"It's seven miles. We start at twelve, and it's twenty minutes to eleven now, and I must dress first."

It was very evident Milly could not go with him to the Rectory, start for a long country walk, and get back and dress, in an hour and twenty minutes.

"I'm very sorry," said John.

"So am I. Well, you will be going somewhere else another day, and you must let me go with you then," said Milly; and added, in a matter-of-fact tone, "I hate Mrs Thorne."

"So do I," was the fervent rejoinder. "You can't get off, I suppose?"

Milly made a despondent little face, and shook her head.

"I'm *very* sorry," he said again. "I didn't want to miss one of our walks, especially when my visit is coming to an end."

"Is it?" said Milly—"already?"

"Why, I've been here a month. Yes, I must be off soon now."

"But I suppose you will be back again before very long, won't you?"

John looked surprised. "Why? No; I'm afraid there's not much chance of that at present. I hope I may see Drayford again some day, but I'm sure I don't know."

It was Milly's turn to wonder. "But, Mr Eversley, I thought—I mean, surely Bella——" and she stopped, scarlet with confusion.

He took his elbow off the chimney-piece, and came a step or two nearer, with a startled inquiring look.

"Miss Hope, will you tell me what you do mean? Pray do—don't be afraid," he added, seeing the hot colour in her cheeks. "I will promise not to mind, whatever it is. Do tell me," he urged her gently; "I really want to know. Why were you so sure I should be staying in Drayford again?"

She hung her head. "Are not you engaged to Bella, Mr Eversley? They said you were."

His pale face was a shade paler. He was thunderstruck. "Who said so? Good heavens! you have thought that all the time!"

"Isn't it true?" said Milly.

"No," he cried. "Miss Hope, how could you fancy it—how could you? Why, we never dreamed of such a thing!"

"I don't know," she began; "but——"

"Hush, here's some one coming — confound them!" said John the courteous; but he added a hurried "Pardon," just before the door opened and Mrs Rivers came in.

He briefly contrived to explain how Bella had sent him to fetch Miss Hope for a walk, and how sorry he was to find she was unable to join them.

"No; I can't spare her this morning," she said. "We're going out for the day; aren't we, Milly?"

Milly assented.

"To-morrow, perhaps?" Mr Eversley suggested. "Miss Mannering will be disappointed, I know, when I return alone. I should like to be able to tell her our expedition is only postponed."

"To-morrow by all means, if Bella likes. You have nothing to do to-morrow morning, have you, Milly?"

She was stooping to play with the great tabby cat which was curled on the hearth-rug. "No; I should like to go."

"We will come for you, then," said John. "At the same time?"

"Please. Give my love to Bella. I hope you will have a pleasant walk."

"We will save the wood for to-morrow," he said, and with that he took his leave. Milly did not dare to look up when she shook hands with him. John Eversley not engaged to Bella—a free man. She hardly understood why, but the news came upon her with a shock of painful surprise.

As she drove home late that evening with Mrs Rivers, the latter said, "My dear child, have you lost your tongue? You haven't said a word for the last half-hour. I think I must tell Matthew how silent and absent we are when we miss seeing him one day."

"Please don't," said Milly, and she went on musing. The wood to-morrow, and John Eversley was not going to marry Bella. Why did he look at her so strangely that morning? What did it matter to him what she thought?—he knew she was going to marry Matthew. He did not like Matthew, she knew from the way he looked at him. But then, what did that signify to her? She had always loved him, always should. She wished Mr Eversley had never come down to Drayford, looking in that cold, surprised way at people. And yet she was sorry to think she should never see him any more.

Our little Milly was dangerously near her waking.

John Eversley found a letter by his plate when he came down to breakfast the next morning. "Oh, from my brother—he's in England again, then," he said. He opened it and began to read. Presently he looked at the envelope with a puzzled expression. The writer evidently supposed him to be in London, yet had directed the letter correctly enough to Drayford Rectory. He turned the last leaf and read—

"*P.S.*—Just got a line from the governor, saying you are at Drayford, of all places in the world. I don't suppose you have let the fact of our relationship be suspected; be careful it doesn't slip out by accident,—there's a good fellow. People may have forgotten all about it; but, on the other hand, they may not. I'm a different fellow now, I hope, and

I don't want to have anything more to do with that miserable, disgraceful time. So don't say a syllable about me, not even to Warburton. Is he at Drayford still, by the way? How does he look, and how is he getting on? He is a good fellow, if ever there was one. I don't like to think where or what I might have been if it hadn't been for him."

John read this postscript through twice very slowly. At the end of the second reading, his thoughts, if not remarkably coherent, were clear and to the purpose.

"Matthew Warburton saved my brother from utter ruin. I must leave Drayford in time to catch the 1.25 train."

Suddenly he became aware that Mr Mannering was saying for the second time, "I hope you haven't any bad news, Eversley?"

"I beg your pardon," he exclaimed. "Yes, I have some news which certainly is bad, because it makes it absolutely necessary for me to be in town to-day."

"To-day!" was the general chorus.

"I'm very sorry," said Eversley, with his eyes fixed on his plate; "though I must have gone in a day or two. Indeed, as it is, I have trespassed on your hospitality——"

"No, you have not," said the Rector.

"Well," said the young man, "I don't like running away in this style. However, it can't be helped."

Bella took the earliest opportunity of saying to John Eversley, "I hope it was not very bad news in your brother's letter."

"No," said John, absently.

"We must let Milly know that we can't go for our walk—our unlucky walk. Perhaps I had better write a note."

"No—send me. I want to say good-bye to Miss Hope."

"You will come down to Drayford again soon, I hope," said Bella; "so perhaps it will only be good-bye for a little while."

"No," said John, calmly, "it will be good-bye for ever." And he looked straight at her as he spoke, with his grave eyes.

"Mr Eversley! What *do* you mean? I don't understand. Has Milly——"

"Milly has done nothing, and knows nothing," said John, with a curious, sorrowful smile. "No, I have been wrong all the time, I think. I only hope——" He stopped abruptly, and then resumed: "I know you think that letter was only a pretext, and that something else sends me away from Drayford. But it isn't so. I am going solely on account of the letter."

"Then why not come back to us?" said Bella.

"Perhaps we may meet again—at Brighton—who knows?" said John. "I hope so."

"Not here?"

"No. This letter must be a barrier between me and Drayford."

"You are very mysterious."

"Believe me, I cannot help it. You will forgive my mystery, won't you?"

"Yes," said Bella; and added suddenly, "and respect it."

"Ah, that is like you!" said John, gratefully, holding out his hand. He detained hers for a moment. "I don't know how to thank you for your kindness," he said.

"There is nothing to thank me for," said Bella. The words were cold, but she looked almost wistfully into his face.

John went to the window and looked out.

"Will you go to Milly now, please?" said Bella, after a pause. "She will wonder why we don't make our appearance." And without a word he went.

It was a crisp, clear October day; there were but few leaves on the trees, and every branch stood out sharply against the pale blue sky. Eversley, as he walked, looked sadly at the pathetic beauty of the autumn scenery. He hardly knew what he looked at, but he remembered afterwards. And as he went, he said, half bewildered, to himself, "Good heavens! That man saved my brother. Yes, saved him from shame worse than death, and I was within an ace of requiting him by trying to steal Milly

away from him! Here have I been thinking him a noisy conceited snob, and the generous fellow has been doing good in a thousand secret ways, no doubt, as he did that once. God help me! carping and cavilling at faults of manner, and never able to see the true and sterling manhood underneath. Well, that good deed of his has borne fruit at last. My sister could not be dearer to me, nor more sacred than Milly henceforth, nor could I be more loyal to a brother than I will be to Matthew Warburton."

He walked on a little, vaguely musing. Then his thoughts, though still confused, flowed on once more.

"Next post and it might have been too late! Now that's what I call providential. I was on the brink of a deed I should have repented all my life — nothing to stop me — an hour or two more and it might have been accomplished! God grant I've not done any harm already! And I was vexed and angry because she had misunderstood me!"

He went on a little further, still like one in a dream. But when he was but a hundred yards from Mrs Rivers's door he came to himself with a shock, and summed all up in one passionate silent cry from the very bottom of his heart.

"My little Milly—my little sister! My *brother's* wife! It's bitter, but how merciful! Thank God!"

And walked the brief remainder of his way bracing himself for the work he had to do. He was at Mrs Rivers's door. He had resolved that if he should not find Milly alone he would ask her to come to the Rectory with him, and say what he had to say on the road. But Fortune, who had just overwhelmed him and laid him low, gave him this pitiful little mark of favour, to find Milly waiting for him, and Mrs Rivers gone out. Like the little indulgences they grant to men condemned to die, thought he, as he crossed the threshold.

She came forward to meet him with happy shining eyes. "I'm ready *this* morning, Mr Eversley."

"And I am not," said John, abruptly.

"Not ready? Why? Is anything the matter? Can't Bella go?"

"I must be in town this afternoon. I have had a letter, and I'm going away in an hour or two." He hurried the words out, answering her questions, and yet seeming somehow to put them by. He felt as if he had kept his eyes averted from the first, and yet he knew that she was very white. "So you see," he went on, "there won't be time for our walk—in fact I've come to say good-bye."

She was stunned. "And you are not coming back?"

"Not for some time, at any rate," said John, with what he intended for a remarkably cheerful smile. "I don't suppose I shall ever see *Miss Hope* again;

you will be a married lady long before I return, and I shall come and call on you in a dignified manner."

"Perhaps," said little Milly. So John Eversley had only been startled at her thinking he was engaged to Bella the day before. He had not meant what for a moment she had almost fancied he must mean. She reddened at the mere thought of her incredible folly. She was honestly glad, she was very glad, she felt as if she were delivered from some nightmare of perplexity, and yet her heart was aching with a sudden and most bitter sense of loneliness.

"Well, I suppose, in a way, everything is a 'perhaps,'" said John. "But I should like when I am far away and recalling my Drayford friends, to think of your marriage as something more. Mayn't I congratulate you now, Miss Hope, as I may not be in England when the time comes?"

"Thank you," said Milly, looking earnestly at the toes of his boots.

"I have been very happy here," said John, after a pause. "There is something I should like to say, if you would not mind. I have always wished I had had a sister—an idle, indefinite sort of wish, you understand. Now I know what I should have liked—a sister like you, Milly."

It slipped out unawares. She flashed back a glistening glance which went straight to his

heart. Yes, she would have liked that—John for her brother, and Matthew — ah, if he had liked Matthew!

"Well, I ought to be content," he resumed, after a moment. "Had you been my sister, I could not have left you in better keeping." (He meant it. The man who could secretly show such noble generosity to a comparative stranger might well be trusted to be true and loving to his wife.)

Little Milly looked up surprised. "Mr Eversley!"

"Well?"

"I thought you didn't like Mr Warburton?"

"But I do," said John, earnestly. "I am ashamed to say I did not at first. I did not understand him. I did not get below the surface—and, after all, that is of very little importance. I know now that he is very good and generous, though, if you will pardon my saying so, I think he rather hides his better nature. I know that he is capable of very unselfish and noble deeds, and that he does them in secret. You may well be proud of your future husband, Milly, as I daresay you are."

"Yes, yes, I am proud," she said, confusedly. But she looked at John Eversley with different eyes; she was not thinking about him any longer. They were the eyes of the girl who had loved Matthew Warburton from first to last. She honestly believed she had, while in truth it was a new passion rising on the ruins of the old. She had

loved Matthew first in ignorance of his faults, and now was suddenly justified in loving him in spite of them. John Eversley was a dear, dear friend, but never had been, never could be, anything more.

He looked at her and saw that he had in one moment killed the newly-springing flower of love he would have given all he possessed to cherish. He had tried to do it—he was honestly glad he had done it—but he would ten times rather have killed himself.

"Remember me very kindly to Warburton, Milly," he said. "Tell him I congratulate him—as sincerely as I congratulate you. But don't tell him what I have said of him—he might not be pleased at our chattering. And now I must say good-bye."

She gave him her hand. "Good-bye, Mr Eversley. But *do* come back again. *Please.*"

"One day, perhaps," said John, smiling. "I shall hear of you sometimes from Bella. God bless you, little sister, and good-bye."

He lifted her little hand to his lips and was gone.

From London he wrote to his brother:—

"I left Drayford the very day your letter came. I never heard your name mentioned, and no one imagined for a moment that I was connected with any Lisles.

"I am just off to the Continent for a little while, but I will certainly manage to see you before you

go back to Canada. Your friend Warburton is doing well; the Drayford people seem to think a great deal of him. I believe he is going to be married in the spring."

John Eversley was away for some months. There was a slim, melancholy gentleman at a hotel in Paris, pacing wearily to and fro on New-Year's night, when Milly sat with Matthew by Mrs Rivers's fireside, happy in the possession of a new watch and chain, and, above all, happy in the possession of her lover.

But he had crossed the Channel and was in London on an important day which had been named in a hurried note in Bella's large handwriting—a day when Drayford bells rang merrily, and the sweetest and shyest of brides, with a dear little childish April face, came down a flower-strewn path with her big, beaming, handsome bridegroom by her side. Of course the latter made a great speech at the breakfast, eliciting burst after burst of laughter and applause, while little Milly hung her head, and blushed at every complimentary allusion to herself. Of course there were plenty of good wishes, of champagne-drinking, of hand-shaking and kissing—Mr Warburton getting quite his fair share of the last, I believe—and a perfect hailstorm of white shoes as the carraige drove off. And John Eversley, who, thanks to Miss Mannering's note, knew the train by which the happy pair were to start, pictured

the jubilant departure, and said softly to himself, "God bless her! God bless them both!"

He waited in town till he got a letter the next morning, just a single hasty line; then he hurried home to see his brother, who was going away in a few days.

It was afternoon. John was leaning with his back against the chimney-piece in the dingy room which was called his father's study. Through the window he could see the dark tangled little plot, ironically supposed to be a flower-garden, and further off the grey church-tower among the clustered elms. His hands were in his pocket, and he was absently staring at the trees and sky, and listening to the birds which twittered among the budding boughs.

George Lisle sat on a low chair with his legs across a rather higher one, smoking a short pipe. He was a fine young fellow, a little rough and sunburnt perhaps, but much handsomer than John. The brothers had been apart for years—in fact they had never been together for any time since they were lads; and George, looking at the melancholy man of five-and-thirty who stood by the fireplace, could hardly believe that this dignified Mr Eversley of Brooklynn Hall could be the "old Jack" of bygone days. They had been delighted to meet—had grasped each other's hands—looked, with eyes glistening with brotherly affection, each into the other's face, and then had discovered that they

had nothing to say. A happy remark set them recalling boyish adventures. These being in some degree exhausted, each had begun to ask about the other's more recent doings. But George was a man of few and practical words, and his more fluent brother was curiously reserved. So they had been silent for some minutes, and then the elder broke the silence.

"You needn't have been afraid, George: no one seems to remember you at Drayford."

"So much the better," said the younger.

"Of course I kept the secret. Your friend Warburton is well."

"That's all right. Oh, by the way, you said something about his being married?"

"Yes," said John, in his slow, gentle voice; "he was married yesterday."

"Yesterday! Well, I'm sure I wish him all happiness, and I hope he's got a good wife."

"Indeed he has," said John, with shining eyes.

George was lighting his pipe again. After a puff or two, he said, "Well, if ever man deserved a good one he did. Dear old Geoff!"

John drew his breath sharply as if he had been stabbed. "What!" he exclaimed.

His brother looked up in some astonishment. "I only said he deserved a good wife, if ever man did."

"But you called him—*what* did you call him?"

"Oh, Geoff. I always called him by his Christian name."

"But his is not—Geoff," said John, bringing the last word out with a gasp.

George stared. "I should like to know what it is, then?"

"Matthew!"

"Not unless he's changed it. Matthew! What are you talking about? It was Geoffrey when *I* knew him."

"No, no," said John, who was awfully white. "It's a long time ago, you must have forgotten."

"What's the matter?" said George, tumbling his long legs off the chair and sitting bolt upright. "Nonsense about forgetting. I know his name as well as my own. Oh, well, you needn't believe me unless you like: just you get the governor's Clergy List—I see it on the bottom shelf there—and you'll find him sure enough, the Rev. Geoffrey Lionel War—— Jack, old fellow—Jack, what is it?"

For John, quiet courteous John, suddenly burst out with an oath, and then with a queer laugh turned away from his brother.

"You had better a thousand times over have stabbed me or poisoned me than sent me that cursed letter," he said at last.

"What is it? what have I done?" cried the bewildered George. "Tell me, Jack—I'm very sorry."

But John gave him no answer. George tried to see his face, but could not. "Matthew," said Lisle, half to himself, "Matthew—why, that was some sort of cousin of his at the Bank. Mat Warburton the fellows called him, I remember now. He had a fever or something very soon after I got there, and went away for a holiday afterwards. I never knew anything of him. I say, Jack, is it he that is married, and not old Geoff? Tell me what mischief I've done—there's a good fellow. I'm sure I never meant——"

But John suddenly turned a white menacing face towards him, and George understood that, for the moment, his brother's mysterious agony was too deep for explanatory words.

The Folkestone boat glides pleasantly through a softly-whispering sea. There is just a faint breeze, as if April drew a glad breath of wonder at the freshly-unfolding beauty of the world. The ocean is a floor of burnished silver under the cloudless blue.

A big gentleman is pacing to and fro, smoking a big cigar, but he stops pretty frequently to speak to a little lady, who, carefully cloaked and sheltered, sits on one of the benches, rejoicing in what is almost her first sight of the sea. But her eyes, delighted as she is with the glittering grey waves, leave them from time to time to follow her handsome husband. And when he speaks, she answers

with glad uplifted face and happy smiles. For is not everything new and wonderful? and was there ever any one so kind and noble as her husband? and is not Mrs Matthew Warburton going to spend her honeymoon in Paris?

My story ends with April 1869. A word or two concerning these friends of ours at the present time and I have done.

John Eversley has neither gone mad, nor shot himself, nor died of a broken heart. He has given up wandering, and lives on his estate. If anything, he is rather more gentle and silent than before, but that is all: he is not like King Henry—he smiles sometimes; only unfortunately it is just then that you understand how sad his face can look.

Bella has known bitter sorrow during the past year. Mr Mannering died suddenly, and the shock was too much for his ailing wife. Their parting was only for a month. Much wonder was expressed as to what Miss Mannering would do, but she turned it into surprise by announcing that she was going with her brother to Australia. "I hope, my dear, you have considered it well," said Mrs Rivers, aghast, across the luncheon-table.

"Yes," said Bella, calmly, "I've considered a good deal. I think it is the only chance for Arthur, and I've no one else left now. He has promised to make a home for me."

"And if he ruins himself?"

"Why, I suppose he'll ruin me, and that is just what makes me hopeful. If I were safe, I could not help him. At any rate I'll risk it."

She looked so quietly resolute that little more was said. I am not altogether sorry for Bella. Her upward path is toilsome, but it is something to be rising higher day by day. Bella, in her sombre crape, with cheeks that have lost their damask bloom, and are more like rain-washed Christmas roses, and with clear eyes looking out to the home across the sea, is better, and, I will believe, happier than had she been Mr Warburton's wife. She bade him good-bye with a sort of wistful seriousness. "I shall often think of you and Milly," she said, "and hope you are happy."

Matthew Warburton was touched. "Good-bye, Bella, and God bless you!" he said. She had enough of the old tenderness remaining to value the benediction.

Any good wishes which she may bestow on Matthew are likely to be fulfilled. He is happy, and I am glad to be able to write it. He is good enough for me to rejoice in his prosperity, especially as I doubt if he is good enough for sorrow to make him better. He has the desire of his heart, and his satisfaction is written legibly on his face.

And Milly? She is happy too. I will not say that nothing in her husband's words or manner

ever jars upon her, but such jarring gives her little pain. She acknowledges frankly to herself that there is something loud and coarse in the outward man. So be it. She is content to worship the generous nature which it masks.

She is the brightest, yet the most anxious of little housekeepers. She impresses upon her servants, in her clear bird-like voice, that "Mr Warburton likes this," or "Mr Warburton does not like that," and generally that "Mr Warburton is very particular." She thinks she is very dignified and capable. The servants know that their master's eyes are keen, which comes to the same thing.

Her manners, in the opinion of Drayford society, are immensely improved. She does not blush so readily, or look up with quite such an ingenuous desire to please into the eyes of any one she may talk with. But there is not any real difference. In the evening when they are alone she sits on Matthew's knee if he is inclined to be frivolous, twists her soft little fingers in his big whiskers, and talks her pretty childish nonsense. He is good-humouredly amused.

"Tell you what, Milly," he would say, "I daresay you think you look like a married lady. *I* wonder people don't ask you to the children's parties."

"It would be great fun," said Milly. "I like

blind-man's buff, and sandwiches, and custards, and orange wine."

Matthew made a wry face.

"You could come and fetch me home at eight o'clock," Milly continued. "It's your own fault. What did you marry me for? Why didn't you have aunt, if you wanted somebody dignified?"

"Thanks," said Mr Warburton; "but I know somebody, not a hundred miles away, who wouldn't have liked that. Somebody who looked uncommonly melancholy, *I* can tell you, when she thought I *did* care for somebody else."

Milly had to raise her head and show a glowing face. "Oh, what a lot of somebodies!" she said.

"Ah," said Mr Warburton, with his great happy laugh, "but only one somebody for me."

Yes, Milly is happy, and I don't know why she should be otherwise. But I cannot as cordially rejoice in her happiness.

Yet is it not best? Suppose she had opened her eyes, and loved John Eversley, and they had gone away to live their lives together, would that have been a perfect ending? Would little Milly have been quite as childishly sweet and pure, if she had broken what she considered a sacred bond, and been faithless when she thought her faith was pledged? I think not.

Or, on the other hand, could I have been as well content had I left her worshipping the Matthew

Warburton who was known to all the world? It was to be regretted when she knew no one better, it would have been degrading when she did.

Why then, after all, is not this the best ending of all? To have her first love ennobled and idealised so that she was able to be true to herself in being true to it, to have even that coarseness and vulgarity which might have killed love turned into lessons of a yet higher love looking beyond the ignoble husk to find the noble heart—*why* am I not resigned to my little heroine's fate? She fell in love unwisely—many girls do; she is sheltered from some of the saddest results of her folly—many are not. She is not degraded by her dream, and there is no fear of a dreary waking.

I look back at what I have just written. I cannot deny it, I cannot say how I would have had it otherwise; I cannot be angry with Milly for her first mistake. "But the pity of it! oh the pity of it!"

# MRS BEAUCHAMP'S VENGEANCE.

[*MAGA.* May 1861.]

## CHAPTER I.

### SITTING FOR A PORTRAIT.

"THE head a *leetle* more this way," said Charles Rackit, slightly pointing with his mahl-stick; "not quite so much. There, that's the very thing. Now look towards me."

"So?" asked the docile and pretty Mrs Beauchamp, whose portrait was slowly taking shape on the canvas.

"Charming," said the painter, sweeping a bold line down the hair.

Nothing could be prettier than the young widow, whose features he was intently perusing, while her affianced second husband was wearily perusing the 'Times,' trying to extract mental nutriment from offers of desirable family mansions, selt-acting boot-jacks, and articles of common use and uncommon names; occasionally interested by the appeal

to a runaway husband, who was earnestly implored to return to his disconsolate family and duns; but feeling, on the whole, a languid interest in the ninety-six columns of information. Mr Smythe Briggs, the gentleman in question, was an ornament to the Corn Exchange, but his views of art were not lofty, and his interest in this portrait of his "intended" simply showed itself in a not unreasonable impatience to see it finished. In vain his friend, the painter, tried to rouse "a nobler enthusiasm." It wouldn't do. Briggs was not enthusiastic — and he wanted to get married. Until the portrait was finished the marriage was not to take place. Mrs Beauchamp had said so; and what Mrs Beauchamp said, she meant.

Now I don't know whether you agree with Briggs—(I do)—that sitting by, while a portrait is being taken, is one of the least flattering and exhilarating of positions. You are so obviously playing dummy. It is not *your* noble features that are being contemplated; and if you are at all jealously disposed, it is not very pleasant to sit by and see another man scrutinising the features which you regard as peculiarly your own. Suppose you not to be of a jealous disposition, the situation then becomes simply fatiguing. You feel that you are *outside* the real business and interest of the scene. You are "playing propriety," and perhaps both the others wish you away.

Briggs was not jealous, but he was bored. He had made some novel observations respecting the weather, and foreign affairs, sprinkled with personal details as to purchases he had made, or intended to make; he had read the 'Times;' and he had for the fiftieth time looked at all the paintings, sketches, casts, and odds and ends, in the atelier; and now there seemed nothing left to do, until Rackit suggested that he should step up-stairs and see his sister.

"Is your sister at home?" said Briggs, eagerly catching at the offered relief. "Then I'll step up. Meanwhile, old fellow, *do* be as quick as you can. Let it be a speaking likeness, but never mind about chiaroscuro, and all that, you know."

"He's dreadfully bored," laughed the widow, as Briggs left the atelier.

"Is he jealous?"

"Jealous? of whom?"

"Why . . . your head a little more this way . . . he doesn't seem to like my having to look at you so intently. As if a man with eyes to see, a soul to appreciate . . . You have moved again! ——If it has been wearisome to him to be present at these sittings—delicious sittings!—why doesn't he keep away? I don't want him. His presence irritates me——it stifles my emotions——"

"Is portrait-painting then so *very* agitating?" asked the widow, with an arch smile, and pretend-

ing not to understand him. "I thought it was quite mechanical."

"So it is, with *other* sitters."

There was a pause. He felt that he had said too much, so he began vigorously painting.

Charles Rackit was not an R.A., not even an A.R.A.; but he was a painter of fervid genius, I have been told (by himself); and he was, I observed, a man of flighty imagination, and not very sedate habits. He wore very long hair, and took extremely long credit. Bills he considered to be "proofs of the egoism of our age." He was generally eloquent on "our age," speaking as if he were intimately acquainted with other ages; and complained loudly of the "prosaisms of the day," which robbed life of its romance. In an unguarded moment I once asked him whether romance were really indispensable to existence? A look was his reply.

He liked me, though he said I was "utterly respectable;" and I liked him, though I could have wished to see him less unsettled, as I once remarked.

"Unsettled?" he replied. "It is true, I *am* unsettled; so is the eagle!"

It was not clear to me how the habits of eagles could serve as exemplars to portrait-painters.

"The polype," he continued, dashing the long hair back from his face—"the polype is settled.

Go and admire it. There it is, fixed for ever to its bit of rock, passive, amid the noble tumult of life."

As I knew nothing of the domestic economy of polypes, and had but the dimmest perception of what bearing they could have on the present question, beyond the very obvious proposition that he, Rackit, was not a polype, I was silent. He fancied he had answered me.

Having given this glimpse of the painter, let us return to his atelier, and the scene which is being acted there. He is still painting silently, and feeling every moment his embarrassment increase; but observing that Mrs Beauchamp seems quite calm, he resumes the interrupted conversation.

"I said that it was mechanical work, in general, painting the portraits of ordinary people. But the soul has its sympathies—its finer instincts."

Not distinctly comprehending the full significance of this proposition, Mrs Beauchamp merely smiled, and said, "Oh yes."

He quitted the easel, and said, as he approached her, "Your shoulder is a little too advanced; your hand should be here."

He took her hand; but instead of placing it in the eminently desirable position, he held it lingeringly in his.

"There?" she said, with an arch smile, which quickly broke out into a ringing laugh.

Rackit felt ridiculous, so letting the hand fall, he returned to his easel.

"What an original you are!" said the laughing wicked widow.

"Would you have me a stone when a goddess sits to me?"

"Don't be mythological, please," she said; "I would rather you should be serious than throw 'Lemprière's Dictionary' at my head."

"I am serious," he replied. "People think me gay and careless. It's a mistake. By nature I am profoundly serious—the income-tax not more so."

To this Mrs Beauchamp made no reply.

"I should have thought," he continued, "that you would have better understood me."

"Surely," she said, "it was the kindest thing I could do, *not* to understand you."

"What do you mean?"

"Nay, you will force me to ask you what *you* mean?"

"And if—if I were to speak *plainly?*"

"In that case, I should be forced to remind you of a detail, a trifling detail which you seem to have forgotten."

"And that is——?"

She hesitated a moment; then looking fixedly at him said—

"Mr Smythe Briggs is your friend."

"I know it!" passionately exclaimed Rackit—"know it but too well."

"You seem to have forgotten it, though."

"Never, not for one instant. Don't be offended with me. I know you belong to another — are about to belong to him. I know you can never be mine——"

"Mr Rackit!"

"I must speak now, I must tell all. You have misunderstood me. I must clear myself."

"It will be much better to let the subject drop altogether. Too much has been said."

"You must hear me now. Mrs Beauchamp, sweet Mrs Beauchamp, understand me. I know the respect due to you, but I cannot help my feelings. The beam of sunshine gladdens the artist's room, though he cannot call the sun his own."

The slightly theatrical tone in which this was said threw the widow into a provoking fit of laughter, during which Rackit looked supremely ridiculous. No man likes to be laughed at when he is not deliberately humorous; and to be laughed at when you are deliberately sentimental, is one of the cruelest of positions. Real passion resents ridicule with savage energy; but affected passion is powerless in the presence of ridicule, because it feels itself detected.

"I did not know that I had said anything funny," he grimly said, at length.

"Excuse my rudeness," she said, "but the idea tickled me so immensely."

"What idea, if I may ask?"

"The idea of all your sitters as beams of sunshine, and this as the hothouse for such *very* exotic plants."

"I am glad you can laugh. It proves that you are not angry. I have stood for hours before your portrait, agitated, vexed, discouraged——"

Here he took her hand and pressed it tenderly.

"You seem to have regained your courage," she said.

"While I hold this hand I feel capable of anything. Continue, as before, to be a beam of sunshine,—it will give me strength—genius. I will paint pictures that shall drive Millais to despair, and make the Academicians aghast at my audacity."

"As to audacity," said the widow, withdrawing her hand, "that is not likely to be in default."

"Be my lodestar."

"Don't be ridiculous."

"I am serious. Listen to me. I will be frank with you. You have discovered my secret; but as my passion passes no limit of respect, you cannot object to it."

"But I can, and will, and do object," said the widow, resolutely.

"Never mind," he said, "you can't prevent it. I demand no return, observe."

"Very considerate!"

"I know you are to be another's. To be—ye gods! to be Mrs Briggs!"

"Mr Rackit!" she exclaimed, in a tone of severity.

"You may command me to be silent."

"I do."

"And I obey. But you cannot command me to be insensible. You may tear out my tongue with red-hot pincers, but you must tear out my heart before I can be dead to such loveliness, such grace, such winning ways——"

Mrs Beauchamp rose and quietly put on her bonnet.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"To join Mr Briggs and your sister."

"Go, then, beautiful statue. You have no heart, no feeling."

Mrs Beauchamp scarcely looked at him, and yet he felt as if she looked through him as she quietly said—

"Have I not?"

"None; as cold as ice."

"Don't be too sure of that," she said, as she opened the door and disappeared, leaving Rackit dazed. Instead of following her, he took up his palette and began mixing the colours with an air of preoccupation.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE SORROWS OF WERTHER.

Mrs Beauchamp went up-stairs to see Arabella Rackit, who was quarrelling with Briggs about Mario, whom that ornament of the Corn Exchange thought a namby-pamby kind of fellow. He was delighted at the entrance of his Emily; nor was Arabella less so, for she felt certain of having an ally on this question. But the widow did not enter very warmly into the dispute; and, indeed, seemed to be somewhat preoccupied. If she had imagined that Rackit would have rushed after her, and gently forced her back into the atelier, she was mistaken. If she now imagined that he would speedily present himself, she was mistaken. Mario and Grisi, Tamberlik and Verdi, 'Adam Bede' and 'The Idylls of the King,' Epsom and the shape of bonnets,—these and twenty other subjects were discussed with more or less fervour, but no Rackit appeared.

At last the widow rose to take leave. Briggs expressed his intention of having a look at the likeness. She loudly protested there was no time to-day; but he as firmly declared there was time, and plenty; and that he must "take a squint at it." A sudden thought seemed to strike her, and she consented graciously to go down again to the

atelier. In fact, she rather wished to see how the artist looked.

They tapped at his door, but receiving no answer opened and went in. Rackit was standing contemplating the portrait, with both hands thrust amid his long dishevelled locks. His face flushed and his eyes sparkled as he saw her; and she also looked a little confused.

"You don't seem to have made much progress," said Briggs.

"You don't understand portrait-painting, my dear fellow."

"Probably not. I prefer photography."

"Goth!"

"Goth if you like, but I do. It's done in an instant, and so cheap."

"Very cheap," said Rackit, grimly.

"But there is no talent required for that," suggested the widow, anxious to propitiate the artist.

"So much the better," retorted Briggs. "What's the use of talent?"

"*You* cannot be expected to know that," said Rackit, with a sarcastic smile.

"Oh yes, I can though. I'll tell you what it is. Talent is the ape of Nature. It does imperfectly what Nature does perfectly."

"It's something more than that."

"Yes, I know—it's a pretext for charging high."

At which sally the ornament of the Corn Exchange laughed unctuously. But the others were unresponsive. He was a little nettled, and, turning to the easel, said—

"Now look at this portrait. Devilish clever, I daresay."

"You're very good," said Rackit, bowing sarcastically.

"It must be clever, because it costs so much. Very like Titian, and all that—but shall I be quite frank with you?"

"By all means."

"Then I must say it isn't a bit like Emily. It's idealised, as you call it."

"You are complimentary," said Mrs Beauchamp, with some acidity.

"It isn't a question of compliment, but of fact. Now, when a portrait isn't *like*, what does it matter how well it may be painted?"

"You understand nothing of Art."

"No; but I do of likenesses; and this isn't a likeness."

"How *can* you say so?"

"Because I have eyes and can see."

"Will you be kind enough to point out any defects," said Rackit, interposing.

"Well, the mouth is too delicate."

"Too delicate!"

"Yes, and the nose is much too small."

"You know nothing of pictures," said the widow, impatiently.

"I know a nose when I see it. Then, too, he has given you a complexion of roses and lilies, when everybody knows you are as brown as a berry."

"Perhaps," said the piqued widow, "*other* eyes may see differently."

"Then they don't see you as you are."

"You are a great judge, I perceive."

"I know a brown skin when I see one."

"Of course on the Corn Exchange you learn *everything*."

"Now you're unreasonable, and out of temper; and all because I was frank and open. I'm sure Rackit has far too much sense to take what I have said in ill-part."

"That," retorted Mrs Beauchamp, "is very plainly saying that *I* have *no* sense."

"The subject is getting hot—let's drop it. Our appointment with Broadwood is for two o'clock—it only wants ten minutes now."

"When shall I have another sitting?" asked Rackit, in a soft tone to Mrs Beauchamp.

"To-morrow," she replied. "And then we can continue . . . from the point at which you left off."

"By-by, Rackit," said the unconscious Briggs as he walked out, leaving the artist to escort the widow to the door.

In escorting her, he pressed her hand tenderly.

Was it fancy, or was it fact, that the gentlest of pressures was returned by her? Fancy, or fact, Rackit was thrilled by it; and when a few minutes afterwards I happened to look in, I found him in a state of great excitement. It required very little to make him open his heart to me; I saw he was longing to take me into confidence, and, to confess the truth, I was not at all unwilling to be his confessor.

"It's clear she loves me," he concluded.

"It certainly looks like it."

"My dear fellow, whether she pressed my hand or not, the mere fact that she heard my declaration without anger, and is to give me more sittings, is equivalent to a declaration. Was ever a man so happy? Look at her—the portrait doesn't do her justice. Such eyes: sparkling with wit and melting with tenderness. Such lips: pouting with caprice and smiling with gaiety. And this creature is mine."

"How you run on!" said I, trying to calm him.

"Run on, you stone, you log, you unimpassioned what-you-may-call-it! Wouldn't *you* run on if such a glimpse of paradise were offered to you?"

"But you seem to forget that the gates are guarded. Touching Briggs now——?"

"Briggs be—— Yes, you're right. There's Briggs. She can't be mine, she's pledged to him. Hideous nightmare!"

"It seems to me that you are in not the pleasant-

est of situations. To be the lover of a woman engaged to another fool—— no, I don't mean that —but it's 'The Sorrows of Werther' over again, and a very absurd story that was."

"I shan't end it as Werther did, by blowing my brains out. That process is too ridiculous, and the result so dirty!"

"But how will you end it then?"

"I shan't end it at all."

"Eh?"

"I shall enjoy the romance of love, without mitigating it by the prose of marriage. I have longed for some romance in life. Here it is."

"Can't see it."

"I can. Look here: to love the affianced of another, is to feel your heart stirred without danger. She never can be yours—there's the poignant misery, which becomes a charm! Life is irradiated with passionate romance,—you have your passion, your sorrow,—and *no* increase to the weekly bills! With such a passion (and with such security), I shall become a great artist. *I will paint the sadness of the world!*" He dashed back his long hair as he said this, and seemed to call upon the universe for its applause.

"The great dread I have always felt," he resumed, "is lest I should fall in love with some marriageable woman; marry her, and feel the romance dwindle day by day to prose. Now this fear is removed.

Like another Werther I sought everywhere for a Charlotte."

"She's found, please sir," said Bob, his colour-grinder and factotum, who entered at this moment.

"Who's found?"

"The Charlotte you wanted."

"What do you mean, Bob?"

"Haven't you been bothering about a virgin for your 'Virgins of the Sun'? Well, I've found the very model you require, and her name happens to be Charlotte. A real beauty, and no mistake. Such a simple chit! None of your academy models; no, no. *My* choice, sir. Eyes as long as snuff-boxes; a nose like a hawk's beak; and a mouth—oh! such a mouth! Besides, she has an air of modesty that 'ud take anybody in."

"Then you know this paragon, Bob?" said I.

"Intimately—I have stood tea and shrimps," replied that knowing young scamp.

"Bob is a devil among the women," observed his master.

"If you won't consider me taking a liberty, sir, I should like to hear your advice on a point."

"What is it?"

"Well, sir, it happens to be just something about marriage; what may be your honest opinion about it, sir?"

"H'm! . . . Why . . . You see it all depends . . . There are times—— Are you thinking of marriage?"

"Well, sir," replied Bob, "as you say that depends . . . There are times when it don't seem a bad spec."

"Then marry."

"And yet, sir, only think! to fix one's self in a fix for ever; for ever's a long time, you know. Charlotte's very well, but suppose it shouldn't turn out well?"

"Bob is right," said Rackit, turning to me, as Bob quitted the room. "For ever is a deuced awkward word, you know. That's why I prefer my position with Mrs Beauchamp—there's no 'for ever' in it."

## CHAPTER III.

### THE GRAPES WITHIN REACH.

A troubled yet delicious night did the painter pass, revolving all the felicities and romance of his position. He was so full of hope, that when the bootmaker called after breakfast for his "little account," Rackit hoped he should be able to settle it on Saturday—and not only said this, but somehow believed it; and his conviction communicated itself to the creditor, in spite of that man's long acquaintance with the promises of his debtor. Faith moves mountains, and sometimes even creditors. I have often marvelled at the facility with which men,

notoriously without means, contrive to get trusted by men whom they have constantly left unpaid; while others, really possessing some outlying means, and known to have paid their way honourably for years, cannot get even the smallest extension of time. The man who never pays is more certain to be trusted than the man who pays irregularly. I suppose there is a sublime confidence in the former which imposes on his creditors; whereas in the latter there is a secret misgiving, a painful sense that the hope may not be realised, an uncomfortable feeling at being asked for money which he hasn't got; and this perplexed, confused, sneaking frame of mind, communicates itself to the creditor.

The bootmaker departed, and the widow arrived. Great was the joy of Rackit to see her arrive alone. He helped her to take off her shawl, and observed with pleasure that she was agitated, and did not reply to his little questions and remarks. Her agitation grew greater, and communicated itself to him. A certain "all-overishness," which was at once pleasant and painful, made him fidget aimlessly about the atelier, pretending to be arranging the easel and the seat for her, but really disturbing one moment the arrangement of the last.

At last Mrs Beauchamp broke silence.

"I have had a very unpleasant time since yesterday."

"Indeed?" inquired the sympathetic painter.

"Very. On quitting you, Mr Briggs and I came to a serious misunderstanding——"

"I hope not."

"Nay, why should I mince phrases?—it was a serious *quarrel*."

"Dear me! And what about?"

"I was annoyed—I may say irritated—at the criticisms he permitted himself to pass on the work of a man of genius."

"Pray do not mind them. I care little for what he says, so that *you* are not dissatisfied."

"But I could not help feeling for you."

"It was very kind."

"And then his replies to me had a *tone*—oh! a tone that no man who respects a woman would permit himself, especially to the woman of his choice. I am not particularly sensitive, but indeed he was rude—rude, almost insulting."

"Triple brute!"

"I knew you would feel as I do."

"That man must be a brute who would insult a defenceless woman, who has no weapon but her tears, no armour but hysterics."

"Especially when he knows she must submit to his ill-usage—must hear the coarsest accent and rudest language, because she is to be his wife."

"I have no patience with the fellow."

"Oh! had I known the man to whom I was

about to link myself—and yet I *ought* to have known what tyrants you can be. I was a widow."

"Then the lamented Beauchamp was——?"

"A brute! Most men are."

"Nay, that I will never allow."

"I thought Mr Briggs, whom I had known from childhood, was different. But a woman never knows the real character of a man till she's married. He couldn't have loved me."

Here the widow was on the point of weeping, and this roused all the chivalry of Rackit's nature, as he confidentially informed me.

"He never loved me," repeated the widow.

"Never!" energetically exclaimed the painter.

"Eh?"

"I repeat it: Never! I should not have ventured on the indelicacy of such a remark under other circumstances; but from the first that has been my conclusion. He is an egotist. I know him. I saw at once that, however he might admire you (as who does *not?*), he could not understand, he was incapable of appreciating you."

She held out her hand to him with a frank cordiality and an impulsiveness which was irresistible.

"*You* understand me," she said.

"And to understand is to adore you," he replied, kissing the hand he held in his.

"Don't plague me at *such* a moment with idle gallantry. Do be serious—pray do."

"Serious? I never was more so."

"Pray don't."

"Hear me calmly. I swear it is genuine passion which now speaks in tone, look, and gesture."

"No, no, no. Don't say it."

"But I have said it."

"You cannot love me."

"But I *do*."

"You must not."

"I must and will. From the very first moment of our meeting——"

"You fancy so."

"Fancy!"

"You have an artist's imagination."

"And the heart of a man."

"Hush! I cannot listen to such words."

"You bid me be silent, and I obey. I will not tell you how in secret I have hung upon your looks, and treasured up your slightest words. I will not allude to the blissful visions I have had of a blissful existence passed for ever at your side. I will be silent. I know the barrier which circumstances have cruelly erected between us. But I must be allowed to dream of the paradise from which I am shut out."

"Fortunately for you."

"Don't say so. Had fate willed it otherwise, and had you been free . . ."

"Then you would in all probability have never given me a thought."

"This is unjust."

"It is the simple truth, and you know it."

"You have no belief in me."

"Men are so deceitful."

"Not all."

"All."

"You are resolved against me. But oh! would that I could prove the truth — if you were but free."

"But I am not."

"I know it. But if you *were*——"

"What would you do then?"

"Throw myself at your feet." And he suited the action to the word, adding, as she rose hastily, "I would say, here is my heart—accept it; here is my life—share it."

Rackit had been hurried on to this passionate climax, in his eager desire to make an impression; but it was like a dash of cold water in his heated face when the widow suddenly held out her hand to him, and with a tone of trembling tenderness said—

"And dare I trust you? If it is my engagement which *alone* forms the barrier, be happy—*I am free.*"

He was speechless for a few seconds, and then stammered—

"What? That is . . . you? . . . I'm bewildered."

"As you spoke, the sincerity of your conviction stirred my heart. I felt you were in earnest. You *are* so, are you not?"

"Quite!" he answered, though with abated fervour.

"I felt that you were worthy of all confidence, and the resolution was formed which at once sets me at liberty."

How was it that Rackit felt anything but enraptured by this announcement? I do not know; but this I know, that he felt very much as we feel on awaking from a dream which we know to have been a dream, and yet cannot quite help believing as reality. Here was a woman whom he greatly admired—whom he had been loving, as he vowed, for several days, with an insurgent rage against the superior luck of Briggs, who could call her his own; and yet no sooner did he learn that Briggs was no longer in that enviable position—no longer barring him from the chance of being her husband—than he began to feel utterly miserable. Perhaps it was his general dislike to marriage: and he was not merely talking at random when he vowed that true happiness consisted in loving a woman whom you couldn't call your own.

On her asking him if he was happy, he vehemently protested that his felicity was "supreme;"

but she would have had less than woman's sagacity had she not detected the complete change in his manner, and suspected that by felicity he really meant quite another feeling.

When I looked in upon him shortly after, impelled by a gnawing curiosity to hear the continuation of his story, I found him extremely quieted, and almost solemn in his manner. It required only sympathetic expressions on my part to induce him to tell me all that had passed.

"Well," I said, "I congratulate you. Your happiness is now about to begin. I never was in that condition myself, but I have always imagined that a man, when he has received permission to get the ring and the licence for the woman he loves, must be supremely happy."

He looked at me with a lugubrious air that was almost comic, and said—

"Yes, I suppose I am happy now."

"Suppose?"

"Well, to be quite candid, I don't think I should ever have discovered that I was happy if you had not told me so. Perhaps a bridegroom's happiness is of a serious kind. Certain it is that I am awfully serious. It's a devilish ticklish thing, let me tell you, to feel yourself about to take such a plunge in an unknown gulf."

"But you love her, don't you?"

"Passionately."

"Then how is it that the idea . . ."

"My dear fellow, love is all very well; but no man can be expected to be gay when marriage comes tumbling on his head like a chimney-pot. You wouldn't like it yourself."

"Then give her up."

"That's easily said."

"Do you want to be her husband, or do you not?"

"Yes—and no. Look here, I tell you what it is. There is a story of a soldier standing outside a shop-window looking at a picture of a military execution, where the faithful dog is fawning upon the kneeling wretch, who is awaiting his execution. 'I would sell myself to the devil for that picture,' said the energetic soldier, in his enthusiasm. A horrible old woman heard the words, rushed into the shop, bought the picture, thrust it into his astonished hands, and said, with witch-like savageness: 'There's the picture, and your soul is mine.' It seems to me that I am very much like that soldier."

"I can't understand you. The other day you were in raptures about Mrs Beauchamp."

"So I am still. No woman could be more charming, and if I wanted a wife—but you see I *don't*, and that's the fact."

"Well, you had better tell her so before it's too late."

"It's too late already. Besides, I don't like the idea of giving her up. She's an exquisite creature, and that's the truth. Don't you think marriage a very absurd institution?"

"No, I can't say I do," said I.

"Then why are you a bachelor?"

"Why? Probably because I'm not married."

"Now, be serious. Help me with your advice."

"My advice is, if you love her, marry; if you don't, don't."

The announcement of Smythe Briggs interrupted our conversation. Rackit had only time to whisper—

"Now I'm in for a scene! But if Briggs has come here to dispute my claim, he shall find I'm not a nose-of-wax. I may want your aid."

Briggs entered, and, after the usual futile attempts to stave off the real object of his visit, he turned away from the portrait of Mrs Beauchamp, and said to me—

"I say, Johnson, it's a dooced hard thing that we should always be dupes of women, though, isn't it?"

"Very," I replied.

"They make us all as blind as moles—extreme asses."

"Speak for yourself, Briggs," said I, laughing.

"Well, I do speak for myself. That woman there," pointing to her portrait, "doesn't she look the soul of truth? She isn't the woman she seems."

"Indeed?"

"She *seems* mild, gentle, smiling, tender, doesn't she? Well, then she *is* . . . if my marriage were not irrevocably fixed, and if it were not for those disgusting 'damages' . . ."

"You don't mean to say . . . ?" said Rackit, eagerly.

"Yes I do, though. Bless you, the cat is a gentle, quiet, graceful purring animal, but we all know the claws she sheathes in velvet."

"You astonish and alarm me—I mean for *you*," said Rackit.

"*I* am astonished and alarmed for myself," he retorted. "You haven't to marry her. I have."

Rackit looked monstrously uncomfortable.

"You know," continued Briggs, "I'm not very particular. Women aren't angels. We call them so, but of course that's all gammon. And if Mrs Beauchamp had only shown a little skittishness, I shouldn't much have minded. Nay, had she *always* shown her real temper, I could have made allowances. I could have made up my mind to it, as she makes up hers to my not having a Roman nose. We are none of us perfect."

"Especially *some* of us," I said.

"As you say, some of us. She's of the some. I'll tell you what it is which makes me so uncomfortable. For so many years—ever since I can remember—she has only shown her velvet paws;

now, you'll own that never once to give a hint of the claws looks suspiciously hypocritical, don't it?"

"Surely you must be exaggerating," said Rackit.

"Not a bit. Place yourself in my position."

"I can, perfectly."

"No, you can't; not until you know all. Suppose you had chosen a wife whom you believed to be tender, amiable, without a bit of deceit, and then suddenly you find the ice cracking beneath your feet, while you are skating far away from the banks, and no Humane Society at hand."

"Yes, yes," said Rackit, nervously. "Well?"

"You suddenly discover that your angel has a *temper*—a *feminine* temper—a temper A 1, and no mistake! All her gentleness then was hypocrisy, and you are left to guess what remains behind."

Had Briggs come expressly to heap coals of fire on the head of the unfortunate painter, he could not more maliciously have chosen his words. I asked him what was the source of this change in his opinion of the widow.

"I can't tell," he said. "It was only because I yesterday made a few innocent remarks on her portrait, and when we got into the brougham she was in such a tantarem! In fact we had a regular 'row'—the first, and a surpriser! Observe, I don't lay so much stress on that. Perhaps I was wrong. Be it so; but she showed herself to be so unjust, unreasonable, fantastic, and irritable, that I saw, as

in a flash, my whole married life before me—a horrible vista of brats and bickerings."

"Lovers' quarrels!" said I, apologetically.

"Lovers' fiddlesticks," he replied. "Rackit, old fellow, you have an irritable temper; take warning in time, and don't marry."

"I won't," said that unhappy man, gloomily.

"At any rate do not marry one of those *gentle* creatures—they are lambs till they get you in their clutches, and then they're tigresses. Be warned by me."

"I will."

"D'ye think," said Briggs to me, "I could manage to put off the match for a few months? Suppose I were to break my leg, now, would there be a chance of her marrying some one else?"

"No," said Rackit, "it would only rouse her sympathy for you."

Here Bob came in to say that a messenger was below, wanting to see Mr Briggs. That gentleman went down-stairs, leaving me alone with Rackit, who looked questions at me.

"This is awkward," I said.

"I thought," said Rackit, "Briggs had come to dispute my claim, and I had armed myself to resist him fiercely. Instead of that, I find him willing to break his leg on the *chance* of getting rid of her."

Briggs returned, crushing a note in his hand,

and showing the greatest agitation. We asked him if anything was the matter, any bad news.

"No," he said, "nothing. At least nothing unexpected."

"You seem put out."

"Yet I ought to be jolly—highly so. What I wished for has arrived; and when one's wishes are realised, one is supposed to be happy."

"That's a vulgar error," said Rackit. "Only the most superficial philosophy could propound such a view as that happiness consists in the realisation of our wishes. Men are asses, and don't know what to wish for!"

"I believe you're right."

"I'm sure I'm right. Brown wishes for the command of a ship, gets it, and has his head blown off on the first broadside. Smith wishes Mary Jane to *name the day;* she names it, and he never smiles again. It's always so. True happiness, I maintain, consists in disappointment."

"What a cynic you are! If you had received such a letter as this—— but I can't speak of it—it throttles me. Rackit, I'm miserable."

"So am I."

"Not so miserable as me."

"Worse."

"Impossible; you don't know what it is to *love* the woman that jilts you."

"Worse; I love the woman who *won't* jilt me."

"You don't know what it is to love such an angel as Emily—an angel, if there ever was one upon earth."

"You said just now she was a tigress."

"So she is! None but a tigress would have written such a letter."

He caught up his hat and made for the door.

"Where are you going?"

"I don't know. Perhaps to drown myself—probably to the Corn Exchange. Good-bye."

He vanished, leaving Rackit thoroughly miserable. I have never thought 'Hervey's Meditations among the Tombs' a lively work, but it is gaiety itself compared with the reflections which fell from the once gay and flighty Rackit. Never greatly entranced by the prospect of marriage, even with the woman he loved, and considered perfect, it may be guessed that the prospect of marriage with a widow who had her "infirmities of temper," was far from cheering. The grapes which hung so tempting when out of reach, seemed unpleasantly unripe now that he had clambered within reach of them.

## CHAPTER IV.

### HOW TO READ A LETTER.

In silence Rackit made a cigarette, offered it to me, and then set about making another for himself.

No one feels the necessity of speech when a cigar is in his mouth, and it is very uncomfortable to be in company with a man, and dread to say anything lest it should jar on his sensitive feelings; so we smoked on in silence, thinking a great deal. His mobile expressive face plainly showed the tumult that was going on within; but as I had no idea what direction his resolution would take, I dared not say a word; and to leave him in this condition seemed unfriendly.

Our silence was broken by the return of Briggs, who said, impatiently—

"Rackit, make me a cigarette. I can't rest. I have been wandering about the streets like a murderer."

Rackit, who had just finished making one, presented it to him, and he puffed furiously as he went to the easel on which stood Mrs Beauchamp's portrait.

"What a face she has!" he exclaimed. "Look at it. What a smile! Who could help loving such a woman?"

Rackit flung a glance at me, in which I read as plainly as if he had spoken the words, "He must take her back!"

"Did you ever see one to compare with her?" inquired Briggs.

"Never!" replied the painter. "And I have always said that you are a lucky dog—the luckiest

of dogs—to have captivated the affections of such a woman. Johnson will tell you that I have always said so."

"Don't!" groaned Briggs, "don't remind me of my loss!"

"Pho! *she's* not lost."

"She is though."

"You fancy so."

"I know so."

"It's nothing but a lover's quarrel—kiss and make up."

"Ah! I wish I *could* kiss and make up."

"What is to prevent you?"

"Everything!"

"Nonsense! Who ever heard of a marriage being broken off for a little tiff? Why, my dear fellow, angels tiff sometimes—for the sake of the making up again."

"I should be glad enough to make up. For on reflection I will confess that it was *I* who was wrong yesterday—very wrong—I was hasty."

"No doubt. Your temper *is* peppery, you know. I have always said it of you."

"No, not generally. But yesterday, perhaps——"

"Yesterday you were hasty—perhaps a little *offensive*—it may be brutal——"

"No, no, I wasn't at all that."

"You can be brutal, Briggs—I know you can; not that you *mean* it, of course. She will under-

stand that. And no doubt you laid too much stress on a little vivacity in her language: she is *so* vivacious!"

"She is. Besides, if she has a fault, I never expected her to be quite perfect."

"Of course not. A perfect woman would be a monster—her goodness would be an eternal reproach. As far as I can judge—and Johnson will tell you I'm no bad judge of women—my experience is tolerably extensive. Well, as far as I can judge, Mrs Beauchamp combines all the qualities necessary to make a man happy."

"All, all," responded Briggs.

"And, moreover, let us joke as we like about marriage, it is the dearest aim we have in life, you know."

"That it is."

"The haven into which the storm-tossed mariner—and all that kind of thing."

"Exactly my sentiments."

"Well then, go at once, and ask her forgiveness. Tell her you regret the hastiness of your temper——"

"Never!" said Briggs, with resolution.

"Madman!"

"I may be mad, I am miserable, but I am resolved. We are parted for ever."

"Now don't be absurd."

"Yes, yes. It's easy to say, Don't be absurd.

But there *are* things . . . this blow is a heavy one . . . but I may confide in you two . . . dine with me at the club to-day—you shall know all."

"Tell it at once," said I.

"*That woman has no heart,*" exclaimed Briggs. Then going to her portrait, he apostrophised it, "No, you have no heart. One can read it in your face. Rackit, look at this picture—and then read this letter."

He handed a crumpled note to Rackit, who smoothed it, read it, and returning it said—"Well, upon my word, I see nothing to object to in it."

"You don't?" exclaimed the astonished Briggs, throwing away the end of his cigarette. "Johnson shall judge. Listen to this." In the driest tone imaginable he began to read: "*John!*"

"Well, your name *is* John, isn't it? You wouldn't have her say Mr Smythe Briggs?"

"You think *that* a proper beginning, do you?"

"She might have said *Sir*," replied Rackit. "Don't let us be unjust. *John* is simple, affectionate, comes from the heart. I may be wrong, and I don't know what Johnson thinks, but there seems to me (under the circumstances, observe!) something very touching in that simple *John*. It is worth a hundred phrases such as *dearest pet*, or *my own Tootles*."

"And perhaps you say as much to what follows." He then read, severely: "When people find they have made a mistake they are bound, by every consideration, not to continue in it, but, if possible, to repair it. We made a mistake in fancying our natures suited each other. It would be very wrong to continue in this error. Let us part."

Briggs here looked at us as much as to say, What do you think of that? As what I thought was very unequivocal, I was silent; but Rackit broke forth—

"Well, never did I hear a more dignified, and at the same time *touching*, accent of a wounded heart. How free it is from rhodomontade, and from sophistry! She throws no blame on *you*, observe! not a syllable. She doesn't say that you showed yourself coarse, tyrannical, violent, brutal——"

"Because I didn't!"

"Yes, yes, you did; you confessed as much not long ago. Besides, I'm sure you were—you *must* have been—you were angry, and anger is always blind."

"I don't care what I was; that letter's plain enough."

"Quite plain, if read in another spirit. Let any unprejudiced eye read it—read it without bias, without anger—and it will be found as noble in

conception as it is severe in its simplicity of style."

Briggs, somewhat staggered by this unexpected, and, to him, incomprehensible, view of the matter, looked at me. Fortunately I have great command over my countenance, and did not explode in a loud Homeric guffaw.

"Only profound *feeling*," continued Rackit, "ever expresses itself simply."

"But where is the feeling here?" asked Briggs.

"Where?" replied Rackit. "In every phrase. Listen while I read." He took the letter, and, throwing a subdued reticent tenderness into his voice, which did honour to his talents as an actor, he began: *It would be wrong to continue in error.* Do you not feel the selective delicacy of that word *error?* Then, too, the phrase: *Let us part!* No shrieks—no reproaches—all is severely calm, like the expressions of a Roman matron."

"But go on," said Briggs; "you see, she adds, *We were to be married shortly. Our marriage is now impossible.*"

"There again! After the calm statement of the fact, her heart begins to swell, in spite of herself; and in brief sentences—each sentence a sob—she says, looking tenderly backwards, *We were to be married shortly.* Then sorrowingly she remembers, *Our marriage is now impossible.* Really the tears gather to my eyes as I read this."

Briggs was moved, but not convinced.

"You certainly have a way of reading it," he said, "which wasn't at all mine. But listen to this: *I do not think you will find a nature to suit your own, but you are free to try. Henceforth we can only be friends. You will only see me when united with another.—Emily.*"

"Of course," said Rackit, "if you persist in throwing *that* accent into it, you may read hatred in the tenderest confession of love. What does she *really* say? Why, that she fears you cannot find a woman *worthy* of you; but you are free to seek one; *she* will not be an obstacle to your happiness, she will withdraw into privacy with her grief——"

"Pho! she talks of marrying another!"

"You misinterpret again; read it properly, thus: *You will only see me, when united with another Emily.* It's as clear as day, that she refers to *your* marriage, should you find a woman worthy of you. Then—when you are happy—when her presence can no longer be an intrusion—as a friend you will see her again. Observe farther, that here the letter *ends.* Emotion has reached it's climax—the pen drops from her hand."

"He *has* a way of reading, hasn't he, Johnson?"

"Why, yes," I replied, "but then you know everything depends on the *accent.* It's the tone which makes the music, not the notes. Suppose

I say to a woman, 'You're a *pretty* creature'—that's an unmistakable gallantry; but if I say the same words with another emphasis, '*You're* a pretty creature,' it's a sarcasm."

"Of course," interposed Rackit. "A woman may call you a *wretch*, and mean that you are a darling: all depends on the accent. When a Frenchman calls his wife 'his cabbage,' the accent makes it palatable."

"You almost persuade me. The fact is I should *like* to be persuaded."

"Go home; read the letter over in the spirit I have suggested, and it will soon be clear to you that you will only need to make the proper advances—to apologise for your conduct, and ask for a reconciliation—telling her that life can have no happiness for you without her—alluding darkly to your black-handled razor—and she will quickly make it up, trust me."

"He gives you good advice," said I.

"I'll think of it," said Briggs, and departed.

When the street-door had fairly closed upon him, we both gave vent to our long pent-up laughter. But Rackit speedily became serious again.

"Only the left wing is routed," said he. "I have still the widow to fight. If I can manage to pick a decent quarrel with her, she will perhaps be ready to welcome back the repentant Briggs. It's a ticklish business though. I can't tell her plump

that I don't want to marry her, especially after having sworn that I loved her better than life. But I suppose it's possible to get up a quarrel if one is bent on it."

## CHAPTER V.

### THE SECOND BLOW BEGINS THE QUARREL.

Considering how easily two people quarrel about foolish trifles, and misinterpret phrases or actions, it is remarkable that there should ever be a difficulty in getting up a good "row," when one of the antagonists desires it. If those who love and respect each other quarrel and regret to do so, surely one would think it must be very easy to quarrel when there is any desire for it? Yet, I appeal to the experience of every middle-aged reader, whether he has not occasionally found it by no means an easy thing to pick a quarrel. You may be ready enough to strike, but if your adversary won't put up his guard, you are shamed into not striking? You may even lash yourself into a rage, and strike; but, suppose the blow is not returned? you then learn that it is the second blow which begins the quarrel.

Rackit found himself in this position. The widow informed him of her having broken off her engagement with Briggs; and he received the

intelligence with the most mitigated rapture. But she refused to see this, and accepted his feeble excuses. When he said he was deep in meditation, she inquired if it was respecting their future lot?

"No," said he, "I was meditating on my great picture—the 'Virgins of the Sun.'"

With playful reproach she said, "I thought a lover would have had other objects of meditation."

"But I am an artist—and artists, you know, are always self-absorbed."

"Women do not like that—and I warn you, I am a very woman."

"Not a tyrant, I hope," he said, coldly.

"No," she replied, tenderly placing her hand on his arm, "a slave."

Rackit mentally observed that this was the velvet of which Briggs complained.

"You must make me a sharer in all your thoughts," she said, "and in all your cares."

"Impossible—an artist can never——"

"Have a care! Remember I shall have a *right* to know. As a wife, I may *insist*."

Here was an opening; and he seized it.

"My dearest creature, let us be perfectly frank with each other. I must tell you, beforehand, that I shall admit of *no* insistance; and that on the merest trifles I intend to have entirely my own way."

"Do you revolt already?"

"Yes," he said, trying to get angry, "already and always. It is necessary to be plain at the outset. I never could, and I never will, yield to a woman's caprices."

Here was a blow well delivered from his left; and he expected a rejoinder. She looked a little staggered; but taking his unwilling hand, said—

"Well, then, it is *I* who must yield."

It was clear to him that *that* match wouldn't light.

"With very bad grace," she continued, "could I even seem to thwart the man who was soon to be my husband."

"And if he were already your husband?"

"That would be a very different matter, you know."

"Eh!" said Rackit, quickly.

"In a husband," she replied, with diabolical coaxingness, "my confidence would necessarily be absolute."

The claws were shown, but it was clear they were not prepared to scratch—just yet.

"You turn from me. Look me in the eyes, Charles."

He felt that if he looked he was lost; so he didn't. But she took him by the shoulders and turned him round. Their eyes met. Hers were so blue, so tender, so bewitching, that it was all over with his resolution. A quarrel was hopeless.

After an infinite amount of lover's prattle, which I need not repeat, they were on the best of terms, when Bob came in to say that Charlotte insisted on speaking with him.

He stepped into the adjoining room, and there had to encounter a young woman who seemed by no means indisposed to quarrel.

"Mr Rackit, sir," she said, "I wishes to know this: Am I to sit, or not?"

"Yes, yes, of course; but not yet."

"Because I'm tired of waiting."

"Very well, then, my dear, go home."

"But I don't want to go home with a flea in my ear."

"Then remove the flea and go home without it."

"But I don't want to go till I have sit. It was settled I should sit. My family knows I'm to sit; and sit I will."

"So you shall; but not now."

"I daresay, indeed; not now means never."

"You foolish girl, I tell you I want you to sit, but it must be some other day; I'm particularly engaged just now, and as you don't want to wait, go home. If you don't want to go home, wait."

"I want to sit, and don't want to wait. Do you never find yourself between two stools, sir?"

"Often, my dear, but I only sit on one."

"That's it—I want to sit on one."

Several minutes were passed in trying to persuade

Charlotte that she was not ill-used; she began to cry; this made Rackit impatient; and by the time he had got rid of her, and re-entered his painting-room, he was in an impatient and irritable frame of mind.

What should await him here but a scene with the widow, who had heard a female voice in anger and tears, and who began to form ugly suspicions of the morality of her intended husband; and these she began very plainly to intimate to him. He was in no mood to listen patiently to such nonsense, even had he no secret desire to quarrel with the widow; and when he had brought her to something like an explicit avowal of jealousy, he said quickly—

"Then am I to understand you are of a jealous temper?"

"Do I not love?" she answered.

"No evasions. Speak plainly. Because it is requisite that you should know beforehand, that I am one of those who hate jealousy, and think it monstrous, ridiculous, insupportable."

"Then for your sake," she said, submissively, "I will cure myself of it."

It was plain: she was a demon in crinoline; and she would *not* quarrel.

"You will learn to correct all your bachelor habits when we are married."

"Perhaps. And yet no one knows. Bad habits

cling to one like a damp shirt. I almost fear I shall never change."

"Then I must learn to accommodate myself to them, for I shall at any rate be always certain of one thing."

"And that is?"

"Your love."

"Seriously, do you think love of such supreme importance?"

"The *one* important thing in life."

"Then why did you not marry Briggs, who adores you?"

"Not he."

"He does, I assure you. His love is immense! He was here just now, and his grief at the idea of losing you was so pathetic, so heart-rending—that, to confess the simple truth, I felt *ashamed* of my position. I felt that I had no *right* to inflict on a human being so great a wrong as to deprive him of the woman he adored."

Mrs Beauchamp raised her handkerchief to her eyes and said, almost sobbing, "You felt that?"

A bright gleam danced before him. He had evidently touched the right chord at last. Women are *so* sentimental!

"Yes," he said, "so profoundly did I feel it, that I began to ask myself whether it would not be a nobler part to sacrifice my own happiness — to relinquish my claim—and to be content with that

proudest of emotions, the preference of another's welfare to your own."

"Noble, noble fellow!" she sobbed.

His heart bounded. The success was as great as it was unexpected. He blessed the sentimental nature of woman, and continued—

"Yes, Emily, I thought this, and I feel it still. Much as I should rejoice to call you mine, I feel it would be nobler, better, wiser to give you up."

"Noble creature!" she exclaimed, removing the handkerchief from her radiant face. "You make me love you more. By those words you have riveted for ever the bonds which bind me to you."

It was no use. She *would* have him, and his struggles were vain. It seemed to him as if Nemesis, in the form of a widow, had attached herself to his life. It was—

"Venus toute entière à sa proie attachée."

And he had nothing left but to resign himself. Either she could not, or she would not, understand him: one alternative was as fatal as the other.

## CHAPTER VI.

### ANOTHER LETTER.

A man more thoroughly worried and beaten I never saw than poor Rackit when I called on him

half an hour after. All his passion for Mrs Beauchamp seemed vanished, or rather to have become changed into a savage irritation. He blamed himself; but, as usual, the reproaches he heaped upon his own conduct were strong in expression but mild in feeling. It was upon her head that the bitter vials were emptied. She was a designing hypocrite; a demon incarnate. He didn't know what vices might not be concealed beneath that soft exterior. Why did she wish to marry him? why persist in wishing it, when it was so palpable to the dullest mind that *he* didn't wish it? He had no wealth to tempt her; he had no rank; he had no fame—as yet; he had not anything remarkable in the way of personal attractions; what then could she see in him? It was clear she had some sinister motive. Briggs was a better match, yet Briggs had been thrown overboard. Why was this? Some horrible design must be hidden here.

I suggested that he should write her a plain letter avowing that he was by nature unfit for the quiet of domestic life, and unequivocally expressing his sense of the mistake which he had made in ever imagining that he could settle down. "You told her she was a beam of sunshine, and now you can hint to her that in an atelier it is necessary to let the blinds down to keep the sunshine out."

"I'll do it," he said; and he sat down to write. But it is no easy matter to write on such subjects;

still less easy is it to tell a woman whom you have sworn that you adore, how impossible it is that you can have been in your right senses when you swore it. Rackit thrust his disengaged hand through his redundant locks, bit reflectively the end of his pen, drew figures on his blotting-book, but could not get beyond "My dear Mrs Beauchamp." Presently he rose, and lighted a cigarette, and then walked up and down the room, in gloomy meditation. Occasionally a thought seemed to inspire him, and he sat down; but when he came to express the thought in words, it seemed utterly inapplicable, so he threw down his pen and resumed his walk.

"Tell a fellow what to say," he at last said despairingly to me. And I began to help him. We hammered out a letter together; but it seemed so lame and tame that we both felt it wouldn't do. We tried again, but with no greater success.

"I tell you what it is," he exclaimed at length, "I shall cut and run. I'll pack up and go to Rome. I want to see Rome; and when she hears that I have quitted England without informing her of my intention, it will be a delicate way of letting her know that I've changed my mind. She will despise me, perhaps, and abuse me, for certain; but better that than that she should marry me."

"Better still," said I, suddenly illuminated, "if

you were to write her precisely the same letter which *she* wrote to Briggs; I remember the words perfectly."

"By George! what a good idea!"

"She cannot take exception to her own sentiments in her own words, you know. If it was justifiable in her to throw Briggs over as she did, she can never pretend that you are not equally justified; and by using her very expressions you escape call avil."

"Say no more. The thing is perfect. Johnson, you're a genius. I never thought so before; but in you common-sense amounts to genius."

In a few minutes the letter was written, sealed, and despatched by Bob.

Rackit was now in an uproarious state. He punched me in the ribs, and called me his best friend. He sang at the top of his voice *A che la morte ognora*, and threw such fervour into *Addio, Leonora, addio*, that one might have imagined him to be a Mario—in a greatcoat.

In the very height of this excitement Briggs arrived, face flushed, eyes sparkling, hair damp with perspiration.

"My dear fellows," he said, exultingly, "I'm so glad to find you both here. Only think! you remember that letter I showed you from Mrs Beauchamp? Well—all a flam! It's the First of April! she has been making April fools of us."

"You don't say so?"

"Fact. Look here. When she sent the letter here by a messenger—the one I read to you—she sent this other to my club: Listen," and he read aloud, "'Dearest John, at the time I write this note to you, I send another, and a very *different* one, to you by messenger at Mr Rackit's. If that seem incomprehensible to you, look at the date and all will be explained. If the date does not enlighten you, come for consolation to yours, ever affectionately—Emily Beauchamp.'"

I congratulated him, and thought that Rackit also would be overjoyed; but to my surprise I read an expression of deep mortification on his features; and then it occurred to me that, glad as he certainly was to have escaped the marriage, he was deeply vexed at having been made ridiculous.

He called on Mrs Beauchamp that very afternoon, and received from the bewitching widow an explanation which was a reproof.

"My dear Mr Rackit," she said, "for some days you made vehement love to me. Don't deny it. You know you did; yet you knew all the while that I was engaged to Mr Briggs—your friend and my old playmate. I tried quietly to call you to order, but in vain. Now, I was certain that you really cared nothing for me."

"Oh, Mrs Beauchamp!"

"You didn't, so don't pretend you did. I knew enough of you to be sure that the attraction lay in the fruit being forbidden. The whim suddenly seized me of putting your sincerity to the test, and the licence of All Fool's Day suggested the means."

"But suppose you had been mistaken?"

"Then, I confess, my prank would have placed me in a serious position. But I was quite *safe*. I knew with whom I was playing. I knew that, if volatile and thoughtless, he was, and would always prove himself—a *gentleman*."

He took her hand, kissed it, and pronounced her an angel. But from that day to this I have never heard him mention the name of Mrs Smythe Briggs.

# A FAMILY FEUD.

## FROM THE GERMAN OF GODFREY KINKEL.

BY THE LATE FREDERICK HARDMAN.

[*MAGA.* August 1850.]

"Friede ernährt, Unfriede verzehrt."—*German Proverb.*

[Godfrey Kinkel, professor at the University of Bonn, was already known in Germany as an author of some promise, when he acquired additional and unfortunate celebrity by his participation in revolutionary movements. Taken in arms amongst the rebels in the Grand-duchy of Baden, he was condemned to death, a sentence afterwards commuted to imprisonment for life. His memoirs are now in course of publication. The tale, "Der Hauskrieg," of which we here publish a translation, is a very faithful and characteristic sketch of German rural life, distinguished by a vein of quiet humour, by minute observation, and by a good feeling and amiable tendency which might perhaps hardly have been expected from a physical-force revolutionist. It is extracted from a pleasant volume published a few months since by Cotta of Stuttgart, entitled 'Erzählungen von Gottfried und Johanna Kinkel.']

PEACE gives increase, discord wastes. That is an old and a true saying, although many people put no faith in it.

On a bank of the Lower Rhine stands a little village, clean and pleasant to look at, and whose inhabitants are well to do, for fields and meadows are fertile and the people are industrious and orderly. The richest man there was old Andrew, whose house and stabling were close to the river, where the towing-path passes in front of the village. At his death all his earthly goods went to his two sons, of whom the eldest was named Caspar, and the youngest Zebulon.

From his youth upwards Caspar was a strong, healthy fellow, who, at fifteen years of age, could guide a plough or handle a scythe with any man; and who, at night, when he came in for his supper, would take his share of soup and potatoes with the best farm-labourer in the country. Zebulon, on the contrary, was but a ricketty boy, and for three years had to drink physic instead of beer, besides being tormented with all the maladies incident to childhood. After his fourteenth year he gained strength, but his legs remained crooked and tottering, and he was a bad customer to the barber, for he never had any beard. He had no taste for farming, but loved to lie beside the stove, playing with the neighbours' children, who were much younger than he—making them all manner of toys, mending the broken heads and legs of the beasts out of Noah's ark, and sewing clothes for their dolls. Old Andrew, seeing he was of no use in the fields, bound him apprentice to a

tailor. He proved clever with his needle; and, before his father's death, he had set up for himself, and was doing well. But, in spite of this, the girls of the village would have nothing to say to him—not even those for whose dolls he had formerly made clothes; they made game of him, and nicknamed him Master Scissor-legs, on account of the strange shape of his lower limbs, which had grown cross-wise. This discouraged him; and at last he thought no more of falling in love, but clung all the closer to his brother Caspar, who had married early, according to the good country custom, and whose wife brought him a child every year.

When old Andrew died, the brothers easily agreed about the inheritance. Caspar took all the farmland; Zebulon had the house, with the large kitchen-garden and adjacent meadows. He gave up the ground-floor to his brother, with whom he took his meals by way of rent. He himself dwelt in the upper storey, where he had a large cheerful room, one of whose windows looked up the main street of the village, and the others across a patch of meadow to the Rhine. Here he sat upon his board and plied his needle; nothing could happen in the neighbourhood without his seeing it, and with every boatman who put into shore he had his word of gossip, and got the latest news from Mayence or Emmerich. And thus his life passed pleasantly away, and he grew an old bachelor almost without knowing it.

For twenty years the brothers had lived together in harmony, greatly to the advantage of Caspar's children, who were all day in their uncle's room, looking out of the great windows, and coaxing him to make them all manner of puppets and dolls, at the twilight hour, when it grew too dark to work. When one of them was old enough to go to school, he got saucy to Zebulon, because he had heard his playfellows making game of him; and thenceforward they would all, in turn, be troublesome and impertinent, until their uncle took them by the arm and sent them down-stairs. This he was accustomed to do to all or any of his nephews and nieces.

Suddenly the devil laid an egg in the household. Caspar had now twelve children, small and big, like the pipes of an organ. He had been frugal and prudent, and had increased his farm by the purchase of new pieces of land. This made a larger number of labourers requisite, and at last his wife found the ground-floor of the house too small. She plagued her husband to build a new house by the side of the old one: it must not be of wood and clay, but a good brick house, with a wainscotted room in it. For a long while Caspar would not listen to her, for he said to himself that, for the cost of a new house, he could buy a dozen cows and an acre of land. But his wife preferred a fine house and no cows. Reader, if ever you wished for

cows, and your wife for a new house, you assuredly remember that the house was built, and that the beasts were not bought.

But the ground for the house? Nothing could be done till brother Zebulon agreed to give that: for the land all round the paternal dwelling belonged to him, and he had fine vegetables in the garden, and productive fruit-trees in the meadow, and twice a-week he sent down the produce by the market-boat to Rees or Cleves, and in this way had made many a hard dollar, and had now a round sum out at interest. The garden especially was a great enjoyment to him; it did him good, when he rose from his tailor's board, to busy himself with light garden work, such as sowing, planting, grafting, and the like. Caspar, although he had abundance of land and many broad fields, had nothing near the village except a small worthless strip, which lay between the house and the towing path. His wife had conditioned for this when the property was divided, to use it as a drying-ground for her linen. It was an uneven sandy bit of soil, and sloped so much towards the river that it was flooded almost every year.

The best possible place for the house would have been Zebulon's kitchen-garden. It was high and dry, had a pretty view of the river, and the soil was firm and well suited for cellars and foundations. From the very first this had been the wife's opin-

ion, and now she spoke it out. When Caspar heard it he scratched his head, and said she had better break the matter herself to brother Zebulon.

This she did the very next evening after supper, when grace had been said and the children sent to bed. She treated the subject as a thing quite of course, and made no doubt but that Zebulon would act brotherly, and let them have the garden a bargain. Zebulon made no answer, but rose from his chair, handed Caspar, according to his regular habit of an evening, a pinch from his snuff-box, wished him, as he sneezed, God's blessing and a good-night, in the same breath, and walked up-stairs to bed.

But there was no sleep for Zebulon that night. For the first hour he lay thinking of the beautiful cherry and apricot espaliers which, only three years before, he had got into good bearing with the greatest possible trouble, and after planting, in vain, six different sets of young trees. In the second hour he thought of his ranunculuses, to which he had allotted the warmest and best bed in the garden: his ranunculuses were his pride,—no one in the neighbourhood, not even the nurserymen in the adjacent towns, could compete with him for variety of sorts. After midnight his fancy led him along the neat, well-kept walk, for which he himself had brought the gravel—two hundred barrowfuls at the least—with the sweat of his brow and the toil of his

arms, from the river's edge; and he paced round the neat little plot in the middle, bordered with sea-shells, which he had sent for on purpose from Schevening. Just as the watchman called one o'clock, his very heart was touched by the recollection of the beautiful thick asparagus which he every year gathered from the raised bed under the hedge; at two o'clock he was full of his fine summer cabbage; at three he was preoccupied with green peas; and towards morning all these things, the apricots and the shells, the cabbages and the ranunculuses, the pease and the asparagus, whirled confusedly through his brain. And he thought how these were all to be uprooted and cut down, merely to make room for a house which would stand just as well anywhere else; and how, in his old days, he should have to lay out a new garden, and perhaps never eat of its fruits.

At last a happy thought struck Zebulon: he took a resolution, and went sedately and cheerfully downstairs to his noontide meal. His sister-in-law did not look very kindly on him, for she was vexed that he had not immediately agreed to her wishes. But she held her tongue, expecting him to revive the subject. At last, seeing him silent, she got impatient, and came out with an abrupt question. "Well, brother-in-law," she said, "has night brought you good counsel? For how much are we to have the garden?"

"Send away the children," replied Zebulon; "we can talk better without them."

The children gone, he continued. "Dear sister-in-law," he said, "I cannot spare the garden; it is so profitable to me that I cannot give it you a bargain, as behoves between brothers. The soil of the meadow is not suitable for flowers and vegetables—I cannot make a garden there—and, besides, it would take me too long. But it must be all one to you, whether you build a few yards to the right or to the left. Choose a place in the meadow for the house, and for a good yard besides. Don't be modest about it; you are welcome to a good half-acre. What I have will go to your children, and I have no need to boggle at trifles; the half-acre is yours as a free gift."

This was spoken like a brother, and Caspar already stretched forth his hand to grasp that of Zebulon and heartily thank him. But his wife was not content, because she would have it as she had decided, and not otherwise. "No," she said, "in yonder swamp will I *not* build; I would rather remain in this house."

"As you please," replied Zebulon, "and I trust you have all made a good dinner." And therewith he walked, quite friendly, out of the room, and went up to the workshop. When he was gone, his sister-in-law's anger burst forth. If he had answered her rudely, and given her an excuse to vent her

vexation, it is possible that, after a good scold, they might have been friends again. As it was, her husband bore the brunt.

"A pretty fellow you are," she began, "without a word to say in your wife's behalf! So it is with us poor women: blow high, blow low, 'tis all one to you men; and when we stand up for ourselves, and for the good of our poor children, we are set down as scolds and termagants."

"Wife," said Caspar, "the meadow is good enough to build upon, and we get it a gift."

"I will not have it," cried the angry woman. "Sooner would I build upon the scrap of land by the water's edge, which is our own already. It would vex that crooked Scissor-legs to spoil his view of the Rhine, and stop his chat with the boatmen, the old gossip, the——"

"None but a fool would build there," interrupted Caspar. "The spring-thaws and the floods would suffer no house to stand there long. But I must be off to the farm." And he left the room.

Meanwhile Zebulon sat upon his board, and sewed together bits of gaudy cloth to make a jacket which he had promised his youngest nephew, little Peter, for his new punchinello. The child had been three times to fetch it, and as his uncle had promised him it should be ready by three o'clock, his fourth visit might soon be expected.

Three o'clock struck: the jacket was ready, but

little Peter came not. Zebulon took up some other work: "The boy's gone a-fishing," he thought to himself. Four o'clock struck, still no Peter appeared; neither came the other children, although it was their usual custom, after school, to eat their bread and cheese in their uncle's room. "They will be making a bonfire in the potato-field," said Zebulon; "or can anything have happened to them?"

But when five o'clock struck, he heard the urchins shouting and running about in the rooms below. He went to the stair-head and called out—"Peter, bring your doll,—the jacket is ready."

"No, uncle," answered the little fellow; "I don't want the jacket any more."

Zebulon returned to his board, fetched the gay many-coloured jacket, held it up to the children, and said—"Who will have it, if Peter does not want it?"

"I," cried Michael, the youngest boy but one; and already his foot was on the stairs when his elder sister, the pert Anna, sprang forward and pulled him back by the arm so violently that he fell to the ground. "Keep your jacket, uncle," she said. "Mother says you are a bad uncle, and that you have no heart for your brother's children, and so we will take nothing more from you. And mother says, too, that we are not to go any more into your room."

"Yes," cried one of the boys, "and I shan't go any more to see you, you Uncle Scissor-legs. Oho! Uncle Scissor-legs!"

And thereupon the entire gang, big and little, Michael included, shouted in treble chorus, "Oho! Uncle Scissor-legs! Uncle Scissor-legs!"

Zebulon turned as white as chalk with anger, and looked round for his yard-measure to thrash the little rabble; but he felt his legs totter, and went slowly back into his room. He tore the jacket into shreds, and threw them out of the window. Then he climbed upon his board and began furiously to sew at a waistcoat. When it was done he found he had sewn in the sleeve on the wrong side; he threw it from him, pulled on his coat, took his cane and went out—to the public-house.

When Caspar had done working in the fields, he also did not feel very comfortable in his mind. He had no inclination to go home, and thought to himself—"My wife has made a blunder of it with brother Zebulon, so it's for her to make matters up again at supper: I will go to the public-house." And so, because the brothers avoided each other, they met the sooner, and that in presence of strangers. When Caspar entered the tavern, Zebulon was sitting in a corner, reading a Rhine newspaper. He looked ill, and before him—an unusual circumstance—stood a pint of wine. Heretofore the brothers had always drank their wine together, and

out of the same bottle; but upon this evening Caspar, as soon as he saw his brother, called for rum. A dozen of the villagers were in the room.

"Well, Caspar," said the Assessor, "so you are going to build, I hear?"

"Do you know that already?" was the answer. "Yes, please God, next spring."

"And where?"

"Don't know yet; not yet agreed with my next neighbour."

Zebulon looked up a moment from his newspaper, and the brothers' eyes met. "It isn't every one that's obliging," continued Caspar.

Zebulon laid down the newspaper, took off his spectacles, but said nothing.

"I'm thinking," said the Assessor, "that the best place would be on your brother's meadow."

"Yes," said Caspar; "and that is where it will be, I suppose."

"On what meadow do you mean, Caspar?" said Zebulon across the table.

"Well, on yours, as we decided to-day."

"I know nothing of the decision," replied Zebulon. "Since five o'clock this afternoon, not a hand's-breadth of my meadow is to be sold or given away."

"Indeed," said Caspar; "I knew nothing of that. I daresay we will talk it over again to-morrow, at dinner."

"I dine no more at your wife's table," replied Zebulon. "I have agreed with the host here for my board, till next spring."

"And next spring?"

"Then I shall begin housekeeping myself, and take a cook; I shall live above and she below."

"We live below," said Caspar.

"Yes, but next spring you will live there no longer. I have just asked the Assessor to give you warning to quit come next May."

"Zebulon," cried Caspar, striking the table with his fist, "am I to build on your meadow or not?"

"No."

"Or in your garden?"

"No."

"And am no longer to inhabit my father's house?"

"No."

"Then will I build on the strip between the house and the Rhine, or may Satan seize me, and the spirits in this glass turn to flames and fire in my throat! Good night, men." And so saying he swallowed down his rum, and burst out of the house.

Early next morning came the Assessor, and, in Zebulon's name, gave Caspar and his wife notice to quit. The woman was frightened now that things looked so serious, and would gladly have accepted the half acre of meadow. It was her opinion that

Caspar should go up-stairs, and give his brother a few fair words. But, in his turn, Caspar was stubborn, and far too proud to knock under. With his two eldest sons he walked down to the river, and forthwith cut down the trees which grew there. As they were at work, Zebulon put his nightcapped head out of the window: "Good morning to you," said he, very quietly, "and good luck to your undertaking."

It was a wretched building-ground. Squeezed up between the house and the towing-path, there was space only for a single row of rooms. "All the better," thought Caspar; "I will build three stories, one over the other, and so shorten Zebulon's allowance of daylight." But on the side next the river he had to build a strong stone parapet, and that was no joke. There was so little room for the stables that, when complete, they held fewer oxen by half-a-dozen than did those of the old house. On the other hand, Caspar managed to build them in such a manner that they darkened Zebulon's side window, and intercepted his view of the village, thus depriving him of the chief amusement he had when he sat at his work.

With many curses, and much vexation, the roof was got on the house before winter came. The brothers no longer spoke to each other when they met; the whole village laughed at them, but this only strengthened them in their obstinacy. When

Caspar wanted clothes made, he employed a tailor from another village. His children did their uncle all the harm they could, and had no longer any mercy on his fruit and flowers.

When spring came, and Caspar went to live in his new house, things improved a little, but yet no great deal. It is bad enough to have an enemy when one lives in a town, but in the country it is still worse. For in the town one can avoid him, if one will; but in the country one daily meets him, at fair and market, at the tavern and at parish meetings, at work and in one's walks; and then one's food tastes sour afterwards.

One day Caspar said to the innkeeper—"I am well housed now; I have a pleasant view all around, and look right into the village: that pleases my wife and is a great amusement to her." The innkeeper repeated this to Zebulon, and next morning bricklayers came, and built upon three sides of Caspar's house, but upon his brother's ground, two six-foot walls, and stuck good store of broken glass upon the top of each of them. Between these walls Zebulon planted, with his own hand, a row of young poplars, tended and watered them day after day, and paid the watchman handsomely to see that no one injured them in the night. Caspar's children got nothing from these walls but cut hands and sore knees; and meanwhile the poplars grew apace, and by the following spring had so fenced in Caspar's house

that he had to burn candles at four in the afternoon. It was all up with the pleasant prospect that so rejoiced his wife. And what was still worse, the wall separated the children from all their old playgrounds, and now they lay the whole day by the water-side; their mother could not get them from it; and, when the river was high, she had constant anxiety and trouble. At last Caspar was obliged to hire a servant, solely to look after the children.

On a certain autumn day, soon after the aftergrass had been got in, Zebulon was seated at work, when his brother's eldest son entered the room without knocking, walked up to the tailor's board, and said, "Uncle Zebulon, father lets you know——"

"Take off your cap," said Zebulon, "when you speak to your father's brother."

"My father told me nothing about that," answered the young fellow, and kept his cap on. "He bade me tell you that, up yonder, where your meadows begin, the dike and fence are worn out. Father says that concerns you as well as him; and that, if you will help and pay your share of a new stone dike, with an osier hedge, he is ready to do so too."

"Then," said Zebulon, "he has more need of it than I, for if there is a flood in spring, and no new dike, his house will be full of water. Tell your father, however, that I would have agreed to his

proposal if he had not sent such a clown to make it."

The lad turned on his heel, and walked away without further greeting. When he told his father the answer he had got, Caspar said, "I am not going to spend my money to protect the meadows of that niggardly churl. Thank God, I am rich, and my land lies high and dry; and though my house were to float down the Rhine, I should not be ruined."

Accordingly, no dike was made. That autumn the Rhine rose higher than usual; and when it again subsided, Zebulon walked out with an anxious heart to visit his meadows. True enough, the last remains of the old wall were washed away, and a great piece of meadow ground was stripped of its grass: there was full an acre and a half of bare earth, thickly strewn with barren sand and gravel. Zebulon easily calculated that, including the unavoidable expense of a new dike, he was a thousand dollars the poorer. And he thought to himself—"It were better that my brother had the half acre of meadow for his house, and I the whole acre over and above, which is now completely spoiled." But he quickly banished the reflection, when he walked along the wet towing-path in front of Caspar's house, and saw the whole family, great and small, hard at work with buckets, to bale the water out of the cellars, and Caspar's wife wringing her hands,

because her whole year's stock of sour-kraut and newly-preserved beans was spoiled in the casks. To Zebulon this sight was like a cool dressing to a smarting sore.

But there was a severe rod in pickle for Zebulon. That same autumn he heard the banns published in church for the marriage of his eldest niece Lizzy with a young farmer of the neighbourhood: and this was done without a word to him, the nearest relative! Lizzy was his goddaughter, she had always been his favourite niece, and for many a long year he had stored up for her a heavy gold chain, with bright ducats hanging from it, which had come to him out of his mother's inheritance. And now——

The wedding-day came: Zebulon was not invited. Although the autumn was far advanced, there was a warm gleam of sun, and the tables for the marriage-feast were laid out in the open air, hard by his house door. From his upper windows he beheld the joyous preparations, and swallowed his vexation as best he might; but when the bride appeared in her beautiful new dress, which he had not cut and sewn,[1] and which therefore, as he thought, fitted her very badly, two large and bitter tears escaped from his old eyes. He could no longer resist the sounds of mirth and rejoicing, which floated up to his ears through the

[1] In Germany there are tailors for women's clothes, *Damen-kleider-macher*.

branches of the poplars. He dressed himself, put the gold chain and the clinking glittering ducats, so long intended for Lizzy, in his breeches-pocket, and went down-stairs.

But for the spiteful walls he himself had built, he might have slipped out by the back-door, and have reached the wedding-party almost unperceived: as it was, he had to make a circuit, and pass between the rows of tables. Stepping softly, and with downcast eyes, he approached the feast. Lizzy saw him and blushed crimson, her mother saw him and turned deadly pale; a malicious smile spread over the faces of most of the guests at the prominence thus given to the gross breach of family love and family usages. Caspar sprang from his seat. I believe his intention was to offer his brother a glass of wine, and I also believe that, had he done so, Zebulon would have remained, and Lizzy's marriage would have marked the date of a new bond of harmony and affection. But just then the youngest of Caspar's children called out to the great house-dog, which upon that day was unchained, that he might share the general joy, "Towler, Towler, there is Uncle Scissor-legs!" The dog was good-tempered enough, and incapable of hurting a child; but the little rascals had more than once, when he was chained up, set him at their uncle, to frighten poor Zebulon. Towler now rushed from under the table, and made a furious

charge at the tailor's legs; Zebulon, who was prepared for everything, struck him a severe blow across the teeth with his walking-cane, and at the same moment Caspar gave him a tremendous kick in the ribs, so that the brute fled back howling under the table. But Zebulon looked wrathfully at the family, and said—"I am going away; you have no need to bring dogs to drive your nearest relative from his niece's wedding." Far quicker than he came he strode through the guests, and disappeared behind the angle of the house.

Quietly went Zebulon through stubble-field and pasture to the goldsmith in the nearest town, sold him the chain, and dropped the louis-d'ors he received for it into the same pocket in which the chain had been. Then he crossed the market-place to the office of the notary, had an hour's conference with him, and made an early appointment with him for the next morning at his own house. Then he returned home, joined the drinkers at the village inn, and asked the barber and the farrier, the two greatest gossips in the parish, to come to him next morning, to witness his signature. Upon their promising to do so, he treated them to the best wine, and played cards with them till late in the night. In this way he got rid of two of the gold pieces he had received for his gold chain—which was just what he desired. At midnight,

when the marriage-feast was at an end, he went home and to bed.

The notary came, the witnesses also. Zebulon had a female relation in the Oberland whom he could not bear, because she had misconducted herself as a young girl, and disgrace to the family had been with great difficulty averted by a hasty marriage. To her and her children he now bequeathed by will his house and land, and everything else he possessed; with a clause providing that the bequest should be null and void if ever the heirs suffered the walls and the row of poplars to fall into decay, or if at any time they sold any portion of the land to his brother Caspar or his descendants. The notary's fees swallowed up the rest of the price of the chain, with the exception of a ten-groschen bit, which Zebulon threw into the poor-box on the following Sunday. He strictly and repeatedly forbade the two witnesses to divulge what had passed. They of course knew nothing more pressing than to tell it to everybody; and before evening twenty tongues had repeated to Caspar, in confidence, the edifying tale.

Money weighs heavy everywhere, but especially in country places, where men, and often maidens, are valued by what they possess. Caspar soon observed that he no longer passed for half so rich a man as formerly. It was very well known that Zebulon, from his garden, and his rich meadows,

and his tailor's trade, derived about as good an income as did Caspar from his farm; and that, moreover, having neither chick nor child, he did not spend a tithe of his gains. Besides this, he had his father's solid, well-built house, whilst Caspar had the unsafe, newly-constructed dwelling by the water's edge; and when the property of the latter came to be divided amongst twelve children, the share of each would be very small indeed. By the neighbours, both old and young, all these calculations were quickly made. The mayor's son of a neighbouring village had long been paying attention to Anna, Caspar's second daughter (the same who had pulled Michael off his uncle's staircase), and on Lizzy's wedding-day they had almost come to an understanding; but now he kept away, and for a long time Anna looked far less pert than was her wont. Caspar himself had hoped to be chosen assessor at the next opportunity; but when it came to an election, everybody said it was not proper to bestow that office on a man who was at feud with one of his neighbours, and so the choice fell upon a richer peasant, although he, instead of one enemy, had at least half-a-dozen. In his own house, too, Caspar had daily fresh vexations to endure. His wife reproached him with his obstinacy, saying she had never seriously intended him to build on that damp spot by the river. His children, in whose hearts the seeds of

hatred had been early sown, had learned, whilst playing tricks to their uncle, to despise the parents who connived at their misconduct. The elder sons and daughters looked upon their father and mother as the cause of their losing their uncle's rich inheritance; and Anna, abandoned by suitors, had not a good word left for her parents. The curse of hatred was upon the whole family; and Caspar, as he followed his oxen across his fields, would often say to himself—"Were I but three years younger, I well know what I would do. But since this has lasted three years, it must last till my death." And thereupon he struck the goad so sharply into the oxen that they sprang aside, and the furrow went askew.

A hard winter came. In January and February it snowed incessantly; at night it froze, and the snow remained on the ground. Upon the lower Rhine the thaw was looked forward to with much uneasiness. March was well advanced before it came: then the vane suddenly swung round from north to south-west, and in a single day the black earth everywhere pierced through its snowy covering. The Rhine rose, and a terrible flood was to be apprehended if the thaw were as sudden and lasting in the mountains as in the lowlands. Had there but been a proper dike made in the autumn! Now it was too late; there was barely time to think of a makeshift. Caspar's stubborn mood yielded to

his anxiety for his wife, children, and home. Without again asking or waiting for his brother's help, he replaced the demolished rampart by a row of large fir-stems, set deep in the ground, and filled up the intervals with strong wickerwork, so as to break the force of the flood. He thus made sure of time to save at least the most valuable of his goods.

The river rose higher and higher: Caspar took away his wife and children in a boat; the water was up to the second floor. He himself still remained in the dangerous building, like the captain of a ship sticking to his wrecked vessel till it sinks. His fir-tree barricade held together famously, and he strengthened it with a great barn-door, which he managed to fix against the weakest part of the wickerwork parapet. This increased the value of his breakwater, and further protected the house from the force of the flood. At times, when the eddies were unusually violent, the fir-trees bent and cracked as though they would have given way; but their elasticity preserved them, and again they righted themselves. If the river did not further increase—and at last the rise seemed to have discontinued—the house was saved.

But one evening dark clouds overspread the sky - a strong wind blew from the west, and drove the waves over towards the village. The rain fell in torrents, the river rose two feet an hour, and the water began to climb the walls of Zebulon's house.

Zebulon lay down in his clothes upon the bed on his upper floor. His house had never yet been endangered by the floods; so he had not thought of leaving it, and had not even provided a boat; and although his brother, also blockaded in his fortress, had a skiff moored to his window, he had no mind to ask his assistance. But, in fact, he was nowise anxious, for he relied upon the strength of his house. He kept a lamp burning, and read a volume of sermons.

Suddenly, however, Zebulon saw the water bubble up between the boards of the floor like a mountain stream in early spring. His hair bristled with terror: he looked around and saw the invading element gush in over the threshold of the room. He jumped up and opened the door, and was almost carried off his legs by the torrent that entered; and hardly had he time to get upon his table when the water was level with the window-still. A frightful death stared him in the face; if the water rose to the top of the windows, he must be drowned or stifled. He made his way to the window that looked towards the village, and shouted for help; but the roaring of the stream and the sharp whistling of the wind mocked his utmost efforts to be heard, and the water plashed in and out, and reached up to his breast. On this side there was no chance of rescue, but on the side of the river a faint hope remained. Close to the window-shutter stood one

of the spiteful poplars. He waded to his bed, rolled up a dry blanket and secured it round his neck. Then he climbed cautiously upon the window ledge: the poplar stood firm, and a stout branch offered itself to his hand. At a short distance he distinguished the roof of his brother's house, still above water. He saw Caspar, with a lantern in his hand, getting out of the top window into a boat; he called to him, but so great was the uproar that it was impossible he should be heard. With great exertion Caspar pulled his boat under the lee of the breakwater; whilst Zebulon climbed up his poplar as high as its branches would bear him, and waited for daylight and succour. To his great joy, he presently observed that the water was falling as fast as it had risen: it was soon below the window through which he had passed, and he began to think of abandoning his uncomfortable refuge, and re-entering his room. Whilst congratulating himself on his escape, and just as day began to dawn, the wind again rose and blew in short but violent gusts. Again the river rolled more wildly, and the poplars swayed to and fro. Zebulon was on the very point of effecting a retreat through his window, when he heard a terrible crash proceed from the breakwater. The roof of his brother's house sank plashing into the flood; and in the whirl of waters that ensued, the strong poplar tree to which he had clung was twisted round and round, as though it had been

but a sapling, until its branches, and even its topmost spray, were at times submerged. Like the tree, Zebulon was fain to yield to the blast: now under water, now whirled dripping through the air, he clasped his poplar in a desperate embrace. Suddenly he experienced a violent shock: the branch to which he trusted seemed to hurl him from it, and he fell heavily upon something hard. Stunned and bewildered, and with the blood streaming from his nose, he felt himself borne rapidly down-stream. On recovering his senses sufficiently to look around him, he found that he was lying upon the great barn-door which had formed part of the breakwater. At the other end of the door sat a man, and that man was his brother Caspar.

When Caspar, warned by the rocking of the walls, abandoned his house, he dared not row towards the village, lest in the darkness he should strike against a tree, or be overwhelmed by the rush of waters. He succeeded in reaching the breakwater, which still stood firm. There he lay at anchor, sheltered from the storm, and with the force of the flood broken. But when, towards morning, those violent gusts of wind occurred, they drove the waves directly against the barricade: after a few shocks, four of the fir-trees were literally washed out of the ground, and the breach thus made was instantly followed by the demolition of the entire fabric. The heavy barn-door, broken

from its fastenings, fell within a few inches of Caspar's head, and knocked his frail bark to splinters, whilst he, as sole chance of salvation, scrambled upon the door. The flood, now unimpeded, roared down against his house, whose destruction he witnessed; and it was whilst he was whirled in the vortex occasioned by its fall, that Zebulon, shaken from his tree, fell upon the door. Upon beholding a man thus suddenly thrown on his frail raft, Caspar's first impulse was to push him off, lest the weight of two persons should be more than it would bear. But his better feelings quickly banished the thought; and when by the grey twilight he recognised his detested brother, he contented himself with getting as far from him as possible. So sat the pair, each at his own extremity of the door, which drove down-stream with terrible speed.

Daylight brought little consolation to the house-wrecked voyagers. The clouds cleared away, and the storm was stilled; but on all sides a vast expanse of troubled waters, strewed with furniture, uprooted trees, and carcasses of cattle, offered itself to their view. Boats dared not venture into the furious current: if at times their door was borne near the bank, the people who saw it were either afraid, or too occupied with their own losses, to attempt the rescue of the brothers. Scarcely a minute passed that they were not threatened with death, by the violent contact of their crazy raft

with floating timber, or with the trees which seemed, since the flood, to grow in the bed of the stream. To add to their miseries, the wind chopped round to the north, and blew icy-cold through their wet clothes. Zebulon took the blanket which he had fastened round his neck, unfolded it, and wrapped it around him. But even with this covering, his teeth chattered for cold.

In that hour of suffering and great danger, many a good old saying about Christian forgiveness and brotherly love came into Zebulon's head, and pressed hard upon his conscience. But just as his heart began to soften, he thought of the pleasant view out of his upper windows which his brother's house had intercepted; and he thought of his sister-in-law; and above all, the day of Lizzy's wedding recurred to his memory, and then his heart became hardened as before.

Caspar was still more troubled in his conscience, and he muttered to himself one prayer after another. The cold was intense, and every moment he was more and more benumbed. Suddenly it occurred to him that, just before he got into the boat, he had put a flask of spirits into his pocket in case of need. He felt for it; and behold there it was, well corked and unbroken. He took a famous pull at it, and his blood circulated more freely, and his eyes sparkled. At sight of this, poor Zebulon's teeth chattered worse than ever. Caspar perceived it,

and quite slowly, as though he counted his words, he said to his brother—

"Zebulon, will you take a pull?"

The tailor's countenance brightened at the offer: his need was too great, his stubborn spirit was broken, and a whispered "yes" escaped from his set teeth. Caspar crept cautiously to the middle of the door, and Zebulon as cautiously to meet him; for they dared not attempt to stand up, lest they should capsize the raft. The one offered the flask; the other received it, and took a deep draught. But with returning warmth their ancient spite revived. Zebulon gave back the bottle, said, "I thank you;" and turned his back upon Caspar, to resume his place at the end of the door.

For another hour the two men were hurried along; the sun shone brightly, and nature calmed herself after her recent convulsion. Caspar, worn out by the fatigues of the last few days and nights, could not keep himself awake, and his head nodded to and fro. Zebulon saw his brother's danger, and this time he spoke first. "Caspar," he said, "lie down and sleep, or you will drown me; I will keep watch, and awake you if anything happens."

Caspar did not need to be told twice, but let himself fall forward, laid his head upon his arms, and began to snore. Zebulon crept softly towards him, took off the blanket, which was now dry, and laid it carefully over his brother.

Another hour passed, and Zebulon perceived that their progress became less rapid. He looked around him, and uttered an exclamation of heartfelt joy. They had reached a place where the stream took a bend to the right, and by some accident their raft had got out of the main current, and was driving through calmer water towards a black line, which looked like a bank. When Zebulon had noticed all this, he awoke his brother. Caspar sat up and stretched himself. "I know the place," he said. "Yonder black line is a dam, in front of which we shall find still water: if we can but reach it, a walk along its summit will take us to shore." In their joy at this prospect of deliverance, they took another dram; and Caspar gave back the blanket to his brother, and continued to watch the course of their raft.

"How is it," he suddenly exclaimed, "that we advance so fast, and our speed seems to increase—if that be indeed a dam?"

He rose to his feet, and, shading his eyes with his hands, looked sharply before him. After gazing thus for a few moments, his countenance fell.

"Now are we indeed lost," he said, in a hollow voice. "There is a break in the dike, and we are caught in the current that sets towards the opening. Do you see? we swim each moment faster. Yonder foam the furious waters: we shall drive against the bank, and our destruction is certain."

And so it was. More swiftly than any steam-

boat they shot along to the narrow rent in the dike, through which the water poured with the force of a cataract, and against whose rugged sides the door must inevitably be dashed to pieces. "Three minutes more," groaned Caspar, falling on his knees, like a criminal before the block—"ay, in three minutes, all is over."

But Zebulon averted his eyes from the broken dike, and fixed them upon Caspar. "Brother," he said, in a loud firm tone, "are we to appear as enemies before the judgment-seat of God?"

Then Caspar's heart melted, and exclaiming, "Brother, forgive me!" he threw himself into Zebulon's arms. For the first time for four years the two men felt their hearts glow towards each other with the warmth of brotherly love. Tears of joy and affection rolled down their cheeks, and on the verge of death they were happier than they for long had been in their disunited and vindictive existence.

A roar of waters and a violent agitation of their raft put an end to the close embrace in which for upwards of a minute they had held each other. In expectation of instant death, both looked in the direction of the dike. But no dike was there. Bewildered with surprise, they turned their heads, and, behold, it was behind them! In the moment of their reconciliation, they had passed unharmed through the very jaws of death. The door upon

which they knelt, and which appeared at least as wide as the opening in the dike, had passed through it, by a seeming miracle, without striking either right or left. They were saved; at a short distance before them lay the land, towards which the subsiding waves were now gently floating them. Yet a few minutes, and their raft was aground on the slope of an inundated field.

Arm in arm went the brothers to the nearest village, where they dried their clothes and obtained food. Gladly would they have rested there a night, but they thought of the anxiety of Caspar's wife and children. Caspar sold his barn door, Zebulon his blanket; and this, with some little money they had in their pockets, furnished funds for the journey. All the roads near the river were flooded; they had to make a circuit over the mountains, and the distance they had floated in six hours was a three days' march on foot. But the three days seemed shorter to them than the six hours; for in those three days' intimate communion, they went over all that had occurred to them in the previous four years; old feelings of kindness and mutual dependence resumed their sway, and they laid plans of future happiness for both. In the last town they passed through, Zebulon stopped at a notary's, and destroyed a will he had lying there.

Late upon the third evening they reached their home. The river was sinking fast; the poplars

with their double wall, and the new house which had been the apple of discord, had disappeared, and left no trace of their existence. Caspar lingered a little in the rear; Zebulon stole softly round the corner of his house, which stood firm and uninjured. His sister-in-law, surrounded by her children, sat in a despairing attitude upon the site of her former dwelling, whence the waves had but lately retired. "Pray for your father," Zebulon heard her say, "for here the flood swept him away; and pray also," she added to her elder children, "for your mother, for she was the cause both of his death and of that of your poor uncle Zebulon."

"Not of mine," cried Zebulon, stepping forward. The children, forgetting old quarrels, flocked around him. "And because you, sister, are sorry for what is past, God is merciful to you, and suffers Zebulon, whom you were regretting, to bring back your husband to your arms."

As he spoke, Caspar stood by his side, and the joyful woman threw an arm round each. Then said Zebulon—"Friends, we have had a famous lesson these four years past; and truly, if it had lasted four years longer, we might have found ourselves reduced to a beggar's staff. But let that be all bygone and forgotten. To-morrow we will begin to build a new dike. Of a new house you have no need. Come back and live with me. All that is mine is yours and your children's."

# THE DISAPPOINTING BOY.

BY JULIAN STURGIS.

[*MACA.* SEPTEMBER 1874.]

"MY dear Septimus," I said, "I congratulate you on your son. He is a most pleasant fellow; cheerful without silliness—intelligent, but not a prig."

"Humph!" replied my friend.

A great part of conversation in this country is carried on by grunts; but if there is anything which cannot be expressed in this manner, it is cordial assent. I relapsed into silence, and filled my glass. Septimus passed his hand over his hair, which is rather long, and still thick, though streaked with many threads of grey, and gazed thoughtfully through the window, which opened on to the lawn. A faint light lingered in the west, and one star shone brilliantly above the black cedar, near which was dimly seen the graceful

figure of my friend's wife. At her side was the young man on whom, moved by genuine liking and the emotions natural to a benevolent person who has dined well, I had just pronounced a seemingly inopportune panegyric. We sat at a round table, over which a shaded light was hanging, and the claret passed slowly between us. It was too old to be hurried. After a silence of a few minutes, my friend leaned back in his chair, and said—

"If it would not bore you, I should like to tell you a few anecdotes of my dear boy's life."

"Pray, do," I said. I was in the mood for listening — disposed for silence and moderately curious. Septimus has a manner gentle as the evening, and a voice which might have grown mellow in his own cellar.

"It has long seemed to me," he began, "that the rules of conduct which we try to impress on our children are absurdly inconsistent with those by which we expect them to regulate their later life. When they are young they are to be unobtrusive, and to give up to everybody; when they have reached man's estate they are to give way to nobody, but to push their fortunes in the world. As well might we punish the child for going near the water, and expect the man to swim; or train the runner for the race by making him walk backwards.

When Tommy was born, I made up my mind to avoid the common error. In the battle of life he should be taught to win, and not to go round, when the fighting was over, with a red cross on his arm. When he was a baby he showed a great love of colour, and would lie for hours smiling at the sunlight, and making little motions with his hands. It seemed clear to me in those days that the child would be a great painter (you know that I was always fond of art), and take a high position. There is a great opening in that direction. An active man, who cultivates a bold style, and is above niggling over details, can paint ten pictures in the year, and, when he has made a name, can sell them for £1000 each. When I pointed out to Jessie what a road of fortune lay before our baby, she laughed at him, and called him Tommy R.A.

"But of course in those days I could not be sure of the line in which my son would excel. My duty was to prepare him to excel in any which he might choose, by developing in him the taste for competition. I looked about for a competitor, and had the good luck to find my little nephew Theodore, who is ten minutes older than Tommy. I borrowed him from his parents, and at once brought the two lads into competition. I well remember my first attempt, and its failure. I had been left in charge

of the children for a short time, and seizing the opportunity, induced them to race across the room for a lump of sugar."

Here I interrupted my friend by asking if the boys were not young for education.

"Not at all," said he; "for let me tell you that in these days, when the idea of individual liberty is in the air we breathe, children rebel against the influence of their parents almost before they are breeched."

"You surprise me," I said, "and wellnigh make me accept the poet's picture. You remember the lines?—

> 'Didst never hear how the rebellious Egg
> Stood up i' the straw, and to his Mother Goose
> Cried, Madame, I will not be sat upon.'"

Septimus smiled in a deprecating manner, somewhat uncertain, I think, whether I were in jest or earnest. He continued his story. "Tommy was a good walker, if you make allowance for the novelty of the accomplishment, but lost some time in lateral motion like that of a landsman on a rolling sea; therefore Theodore, who had a perpetual inclination forward, and went with an involuntary goose-step, took the lead at once, and would have won, had not his head, advancing too quickly for his legs, come suddenly in contact with the floor.

Now was my boy's chance; but instead of going by his cousin, who was prostrate and howling, he sat down on the carpet and bellowed twice as loud for sympathy. Jessie said that I ought to be ashamed of myself, and divided the lump of sugar between the competitors.

"When the boys were a little older, I again borrowed Theodore, and made a little class of him and Tommy, hoping for healthy rivalry in the acquisition of knowledge. I began with an opening address, in which I pointed out to them that the duty of each was to beat the other; and that, as every man in the grown-up world was trying to get as much of the luxuries and honours as he could, so each boy should try to gain for himself as large a share as possible of the marbles, toffee, and other prizes, which I should from time to time offer. They heard me with great gravity, and our opening day was a decided success. I soon found, however, that my prize system was a failure, since, as the students always played together, they cared not a jot who won the toys, which they enjoyed in common; and as to the toffee, they both suffered so much after the first prize-day, that Jessie put her veto on that form of reward.

"After this I determined to substitute pennies, and for a time thought that I had effected my purpose. Tommy grew wonderfully industrious, and

in spite of my strict impartiality accumulated a vast store of copper. Week after week he drew on me with papers of marks, which were duly honoured, until I saw myself in days to be the aged father of the first of gentile financiers. He should direct the application of his neighbours' fortunes, speculate in a gigantic war, become Baron Tommy at a foreign court, perhaps Sir Thomas at his own. My dream was rudely dispelled. One day my small nephew came to me in great glee. 'Uncle Septimus,' said he, 'do you know that it is my birthday?' 'Yes,' I replied, 'and Tommy's birthday too, although you certainly gained an advantage over him, for which no activity on his part can ever compensate.' 'And please, Uncle Septimus,' continued Theodore, 'do look at the present which Tommy has given me;' and he held up a highly decorated whip and scarlet reins. It was but too clear that the fortune which my son had accumulated by his industry, had been expended in a present for the defeated candidate; and when questioned on the subject, the young prodigal at once allowed that this had been the sole motive of his extraordinary devotion to study. While I was trying to impress upon him that if the triumph of the successful resulted in the gain of the unsuccessful competitor, emulation was impossible, his mother came in with a rush and hugged him.

Jessie is apt to act from impulse, as almost all women are. When I pointed out to her, on one occasion, that unless everybody is always trying to get as much of everything for himself as he can, the most valuable laws of political economy are false, she said that she did not care if they were, and that she knew that it was better to help another than to help one's self."

Here I could not help interrupting my friend Septimus with the remark that there was no better way of helping one's self than appearing as a helper of others, if you knew the right moment at which to leave them; and that some had grown wonderfully rich in this manner.

Septimus seemed to think my remark irrelevant, for he took no notice of it, but continued his story.

"You may suppose," he said, "that in choosing a school for my boy I should be greatly influenced by size; for, if competition be a good, the wider the field of competition the better. I sent him off to Eton with a copy of Mr Smiles's stimulating work on 'Self-Help,' and a manual of political economy, to which his mother added a large hamper and a Bible. His school career was fairly successful, and would have been brilliant but for that moral obliquity, of which, alas! there was no longer room to doubt. There was no limit to his generosity,

which was constantly developed by an ever-growing popularity. There never was so popular a boy. The masters could hardly find fault with him, and his schoolfellows made a hero of him, as was natural, indeed, for he could refuse them nothing. His gaiety, which never flagged, grew riotous when he was conferring a favour. He was the author of more Latin verses than have been left to us by the poets of Rome, and never dashed off his own copy until he had wooed the Muses to the side of Tomkins, Brabazon, Jones, Montgomery, and a host of others. Again and again I told him, both verbally and by letter, that popularity is the reward of those who are the gulls of society; that there is no current coin of so little value; and that the only real proof of a man's success is the jealousy which he excites. He now not only neglected my advice, but even respectfully contradicted me; and it must be confessed that his answers had a great look of brilliancy, for he was an unusually clever lad, and might now be anywhere if he chose. I ought to add that he never grew angry in argument. He has his mother's sweet temper, which is a very good thing in a woman.

"Perhaps you think that I have given undue importance to trifles; and indeed I made light of them myself until my son, in a great crisis of his career, behaved in a manner which I could not mis-

interpret, though I am thankful to say that I could pardon it. He was now eighteen years old, when he and his greatest friend, a boy of the name of Dart, entered together for scholarships at one of the Oxford Colleges. I will not linger over the story; indeed, if you will excuse me for a moment, I will fetch my son's letter, from which you will learn the catastrophe at a glance, while I shall be spared the pain of recital."

Septimus, who had risen slowly while he was speaking, crossed the passage to his study, and came back with the following note, which he placed in my hands:—

"Oxford, —— 18—.

"My dear Father,—I hope that you won't be awfully sick at what I have done; but I am afraid that you won't like it. I thought of you a great deal before I made up my mind, but I don't know what else I could have done. There is a fellow up here called Mills, who is just going to take his degree, and is very thick with the dons. He was at my tutor's when I first went to Eton, and was very keen that I should get one of the scholarships here. Somehow or other he found out from one of his don friends (which, of course, he had no business to do), before the last day of the examination, that a Clifton fellow was pretty safe for the first scholarship, and

that the other was a very near thing between Dart and me. Now you know that old Dart could not have come up to Oxford at all if he had not got a scholarship, and it did not make any difference to me, because you always let me do what I want. So the fact is, that I did not do quite my best in the last papers. I am as good as sure that it did not make the least difference in the world; for the dear old man is a perfect needler at a critical paper (Greek particles and scholarship tips, &c., you know), and was bound to beat me any way. Only I did not like to keep it dark from you, though of course he must never know anything about it; and you never saw any fellow so happy as he is; and so you must not be vexed, or at least must have got over it before you see your affectionate son,

TOMMY.

"*P.S.*—Of course you will tell the mother, and she will make you forgive me, I know. I am awfully well and happy; and the fellows here are tremendously kind and jolly."

When I had finished reading this scholarly composition, and had breathed a sigh for the lost slang of my early days, it occurred to me that I had a chance of praising my young friend for a virtue which even a parent could not deny him. And calling to mind an old tale of our university life,

at which Sep and I were wont to smile when we were careless undergraduates, I laughed, and said —"You should be thankful for so honest a son, who did not 'keep it dark,' as he might have done. He seems as anxious to avoid all misunderstanding as was Toby Pringle, when he carefully engraved his name upon the stone which he afterwards flung through the dean's plate-glass window."

This anecdote had never before failed to raise a smile; but my friend was evidently in no mood for laughter. After a simper of acknowledgment, he carefully folded up the letter, and, smoothing it with his hand, continued his story.

"Can you imagine my feelings when I read this missive?" he said. "I could not speak; so I threw it across the breakfast-table to Jessie, and went away to my study. For a full half-hour there was no sound. Then I heard the door of the dining-room open, and my wife's step in the passage. I called to her. When she came in, I saw that her eyes were full of tears. I took her in my arms, and begged her not to fret about it, saying that it was a terrible disappointment, and that we must bear it together. I was quite choky, and she did not appear to hear me. 'O Septimus,' she said after a few minutes, 'what have we done that God should have given us such a noble son?'

and she burst out sobbing. I have long ceased to feel surprise at the behaviour of women. Every man marries a Sphinx. The power which that boy, with his frank manner, cheery laughter, and honest heart, (for I admit his charm, as who does not?) had got over his mother, who is no fool, I can tell you, was inexplicable. If he had robbed the bank to buy sweetmeats for the urchins of Little Britain, I believe that his mother would have cried for joy and gone to say her prayers. There is a peculiar beauty about a woman's character; but as to expecting rational conduct or logical argument, you might as well make a salad of roses or walk in high-heeled boots."

Septimus had now finished the anecdotes of his son. Leaning his head upon his hand, and looking across the table, he asked, "What is my boy to be?"

"What does he wish to be?" I asked in turn.

"That is just what I asked him the other day," said my friend, with a half smile; "and the young wretch suggested that he should follow my profession."

"Your profession!" cried I, in amazement. I had known Septimus all my life, and was well aware that he had never followed an occupation for more than six days at a time. The routine of work which he planned on Monday morning, never

could survive the intervention of the following Sunday.

My friend looked at me rather comically and said, "I am afraid he was laughing at me. You know that I went in for all sorts of things when I was a young man. I was wild about art at one time; and once I seriously thought of making a fortune on the Stock Exchange. You remember my devotion to literature, and how I studied architecture that year when we travelled together. I might have made something of them, if I had not been so often anticipated by Mr Matthew Arnold, Mr Ruskin, and others. It was not until I was engaged to Jessie that I took up political economy, and found that I had been an unproductive consumer. It is a wonderful science, and makes humanity so simple; for by it one learns to look at men as pegs, and to foretell the movements of all alike without being obliged to confuse one's self by the analysis of their characters."

"Well, Septimus," I said, "you can't be surprised that your son should be as idle a young dog as you were in your youth. Perhaps he may some day catch this science, as you did, for it is certainly in the air."

"But," said Septimus, "the curious thing is that he is not idle at all. On the contrary, he works very steadily, but hates to get anything for it. I

have shown him bishops in their aprons, and judges in their gowns, but without the slightest effect. When I took him into the House of Commons he expressed an opinion that all the members should wear wigs like the Speaker's, maintaining that no man could be revolutionary in a wig. He added that, but for the head-gear of the lawyers, codification would be inevitable. When I introduced him to the peer of my acquaintance, he cross-questioned the noble lord about his tenants' cottages. I should suppose him to be entirely without reverence, if he did not sometimes burst into enthusiasm over people of whom, for the most part, I have never heard, and who have certainly achieved no position. But, though he is without ambition, he is so far from idleness, that his industry is almost a vice. He not only pursues every study, which cannot possibly lead to fortune or place, but he occupies his spare time with other people's business. Some days ago my labourer (I had but one) abruptly left the place, and on inquiry I found that Tommy, anxious to diminish the surplus agricultural population, had helped him to emigrate. He is on the point of delivering a series of lectures to our peaceful rustics, who have heretofore been perfectly satisfied with my penny readings, and by these means he will probably depopulate the village. He talks of a visit of inspection to the valley

of the Mississippi. In short, I begin to fear that I am the father of an agitator. A strange lad, of whom the only thing which you can safely predict is that he will do what he likes, and that his mother will abet him. Will you have any more wine?"

"One moment," I said. "I only want to ask, What has become of the borrowed Theodore?"

"He is a very fair player at Polo," replied my host. "You won't have any more wine? Then let us join Jessie and my boy on the lawn."

# TALES FROM "BLACKWOOD."

## THE COTTAGE BY THE RIVER.

[*MAGA.* December 1878.]

[*Note by Mr Thomas Wyatt.*—The occurrences described in the following pages happened nearly ten years ago; but for reasons, some of which will be obvious on perusal, and others with which it is unnecessary to trouble the reader, the publication of the account of them has been deferred until the present time.—T. W.]

A BUSY man, living by my pen, wearied of and worried with work, when the time came round for taking my usual summer holiday I had almost lost the power to make the effort needed for the start. Switzerland, Norway, even Scotland,—to reach any of these countries involved a journey which I felt in my present mood and state of health an extreme

disinclination to take. This state of feeling should have warned me of the necessity for rest and change. My nerves were unstrung, and I wanted rest; but I was in the slavery of authorship. I had given up for a time the press and magazine writing which afforded a sufficient income for my simple wants, in order to devote myself to a considerable work from which I hoped to gain more reputation than could be got from anonymous contributions; and I was under an engagement to deliver a certain quantity of manuscript to my publisher by the autumn, on which, unfortunately, I had received a considerable advance. The weight was still very short, and I knew well that if I took a regular holiday I should never make good the deficiency in time. Had I been living with friends, they would have made me take the rest I needed; but I was my own master, living in chambers, with no one to criticise, or to keep me to regular habits, save my housekeeper, whose frequent remarks on my ill-looks and late hours had become at last simply irritating. And thus the days passed, with the inclination to work growing ever less, without recreation or amusement,—in the appearance of industry without its results.

One sultry evening in July, at the close of a day spent in the seclusion of my chambers with little result save a headache and a feeling of exhaustion, which was now the only form of hunger I ever

experienced, while sauntering down the hot and stuffy street by way of taking exercise, more to gratify my housekeeper than myself, I met my friend Tom Wyatt, whom I had not seen for some time, and who at once noticed my ill-looks.

"You are looking as if you had taken too large a dose of the London season, my dear fellow," he said. "You ought to anticipate your usual holiday, and be off to Switzerland at once. I never saw you look so used-up before."

I repudiated the cause ascribed for my appearance, for I had been leading a hermit's life, and said that I did not see the way to going abroad this year, or anywhere far from town.

"Then why don't you do as I do," he replied, "and take suburban lodgings on the river? I am living down at Stainham. I have got a lodging at the man's from whom I hire my boat. I get a swim in the river every morning before I come up, and a pull every evening after I go down. You have no idea how fresh and jolly the air is on the river of an evening—quite different to this stuffy London air. Lots of fellows I know are living down there for the summer, and the best inn is next door to my lodgings; so there is plenty of company. We have a capital train morning and evening, and we have just time for a rubber going down. It's far better diggings than Switzerland or the Rhine, and ever so much cheaper." And my friend went on to

urge me to come down and stay for a few days with him, and get some boating and fresh air.

But the prospect of living in a bustling country town, next door to a river-side inn, which Wyatt mentioned casually was doing a "roaring trade" at this season, had no attraction for me in my present mood, still less the making one in a rubber while being hurried along at forty miles an hour. The notion of a month or so passed on the river, I replied, seemed a very pleasant one; but I should like some quieter place than he had chosen. For I wanted quiet, and freedom from interruption for study and writing. I was in arrears already with some literary work I had on hand, and must make up for lost time. A secluded cottage on the river, now, or lodgings in a quiet farmhouse, would be just the thing for me.

Wyatt observed that cottages with a river frontage commanded very high rents at this season; but if he saw or heard of anything likely to suit, he would let me know.

Two or three days after this I got a note from him, to say that he had found the very place that I wanted; and he proposed that we should go and look at it together that afternoon, starting by the five o'clock quick train.

I met him, accordingly, at the station, at the time appointed. We did not stop at Stainham going down, for Wyatt said that it would be too long a

pull from there up to our destination. So, passing that place, we got out at Maddeley, a station some twenty minutes further down the line, also on the river-bank. Here hiring a boat, Wyatt took the sculls, and I sat lazily in the stern, as he pulled up stream for our destination.

It was a lovely summer's evening, and the quiet of the peaceful scene acted like balm on my worried nerves. This was evidently just the sort of life to suit me. I wondered that I had never thought of spending the summer on the river before; and I was ready to take the cottage before I had seen it, and determined to be pleased with it, whatever sort of place it might prove to be.

Wyatt had not seen it either, although so familiar with the river. It was on the tail of a mill-stream, he explained, and separated from the main channel by an island. He had heard of it from a friend, who, coming down the river, had stopped to bathe in this back stream, and had observed the cottage, with a notice that it was to let. Rather a jungle of a place he reported it to be, and looked damp; but it might do well enough for the summer. "Here we are at the place itself," continued Wyatt, "and shall be able to judge for ourselves." And as he spoke he turned the boat to the left, off the main channel, and pulled up a narrow branch scarcely wide enough for plying the sculls.

He rowed for about a furlong up this channel.

On our right was the island which separated it from the main stream, meadow and osier land; on our left also a meadow, succeeded by a wood, which terminated in an ill-kept lawn of three or four acres, overgrown with shrubs, on which, about fifty yards back from the stream, was the cottage. A board suspended to a post on the bank announced, in letters almost obliterated by damp, that the house was to be let, furnished, and that the key was kept at the mill. Of this mill we could just catch a glimpse, higher up the channel, through the thick underwood that lined the banks, and between the posts of some neglected eel-pots; but we could hear plainly the sound of the water rushing through the race of which this channel formed the termination; and for this point, accordingly, we now made, Wyatt with difficulty forcing the boat through the eel-pots and punting past the overhanging bushes. Approaching the mill, our progress was stopped by some stakes, partly above and partly under water, which crossed the channel where it narrowed, just below the bridge that connected the mill with the mainland. Fastening the boat to these stakes, where they joined the shore, we proceeded in quest of the miller, whom we found indoors.

The miller told us we should have found the cottage open; it was always left open during the day to air it. His daughter had just gone to shut it up for the night, but we could get there in time

to see it first, if we went back at once. So leaving our boat fastened below the bridge, we crossed it and walked back.

Passing through an orchard we entered a little wood which extended along the bank of the stream, so thick and overgrown that the path could hardly be made out, which enclosed the upper side of the lawn on which the cottage stood. Emerging from this wood, and crossing the lawn, we now saw, what no doubt we might have seen in the first instance, that the front door was wide open, and several of the windows, to let in the mild summer air, of which certainly too much could not reach it through the overgrown vegetation which surrounded the place; and we now entered the cottage to inspect it.

It seemed in bad repair, although habitable enough as a summer residence, and bore that air of neglect which makes a shabby house look still shabbier when unoccupied. A low veranda ran along the front; and on each side of the door in the centre, which opened into a passage, was the window of a sitting-room, opening nearly to the ground. The one on the right was a drawing-room, that on the left a dining-room. At the back of the latter was a smaller room, used apparently by the late occupant mainly as a receptacle for fishing-tackle. The staircase was in a recess opposite to this spare room, and at the back of the drawing-room. At

the end of the passage was a door communicating with the kitchen and offices. The furniture was faded and shabby, but sufficient for my purposes. There were some easy-chairs in the drawing-room, and a couch, all covered with faded chintz; it also boasted a piano very much out of tune, as Wyatt ascertained by striking a few chords on it. The dining-room, in addition to the ordinary furniture, had a writing-table near the window, at which I thought I would establish myself. The least satisfactory part of the rooms was the state of the walls, papered with a dull and dismal paper, now discoloured with damp, the more conspicuous as they were bare of pictures or ornament, save in the drawing-room, over the fireplace of which hung the portraits of a man and woman,—coloured photographs apparently, not badly executed, although somewhat overdone. The woman's was the better work of the two; the figure was tall and graceful, and the face, although not altogether prepossessing in expression, a very handsome one. Whether the person represented was quite a lady could not be told, but the man was certainly not quite a gentleman, and the painter, perhaps in trying to please, had laid on his colour too coarsely. The representation was of a swaggering fellow with a broad chest and a fine head of greasy hair, with black curly whiskers meeting under the chin, moustaches, and a black imperial, wearing a good deal of jewellery,

carefully picked out by the colourist; altogether a beauty man of an objectionable type, whom some women may be found to admire, but no men. "The last occupants of the house, I suppose," remarked Wyatt; "the lady had a temper of her own, or the artist has libelled her; and that fellow was not the sort to stand it, either, I'll be bound; he thinks a good deal too much about number one for that."

We wanted to find the miller's daughter, to get some information about the amount of crockery and kitchen utensils available, but she did not appear to be anywhere about the place; so I passed into the kitchen to make a rough inventory of its appliances, and afterwards went up-stairs and looked over the bedrooms, while Wyatt returned to the garden to have a smoke.

I found him lying on the grass by the bank of the stream. "I say, Phil, my boy," he observed, as I strolled down towards him, "you will be establishing a flirtation with the miller's daughter if you are not looked after—and a very fine young woman she is, I am bound to say. Don't you think so?"

I answered that I was not yet in a position to form an opinion, not having seen her.

"Why," exclaimed Wyatt, raising himself on his elbow, "do you mean to say you didn't meet her inside? Why, she went in not two minutes before

you came out. She came out of the grove here on her way from the mill."

I replied that I supposed I must have been upstairs when she entered, for I did not see her, nor even hear her.

"You may well not have heard her, for she walked so lightly—glided rather than walked. Our friend the miller must have given her lessons in calisthenics; rustic beauties seldom make the most of themselves in the matter of carriage."

We now went up to the house together, and called out once or twice. No one answered, and we came away. "Well, she is an uncommon fine girl," continued Wyatt, as we returned through the thicket to the mill, "if her face is at all equal to her figure. I didn't see her face. I whistled to attract her attention, but she kept her head turned away, with a hood over it. She came quickly out of the thicket, as if she were in a hurry and thinking about something, and went straight into the house. What a jungle this is, to be sure!" he continued, as we made our way in single file along the traces of the path, now overgrown with thorns and bushes. "You will have to get leave to have some of this cut away."

We found the miller smoking his pipe on the bridge. He said that the rent of the cottage was four guineas a-week; and on my demurring to that amount, he added that very likely the agent would

accept less. He could not take upon himself to lower the terms; his share in the matter was simply to get a commission on the let. Had I not better see the agent in town, and make an offer. The agent wanted very much to get a tenant. He had been told to name four guineas, but he dared say something less would be taken to secure a tenant. "Offer three guineas, and you will get it," Wyatt observed to me aside, "and the place will be cheap at the money; it would fetch three times that amount in most parts of the river, with so much ground about it." "How long had it been empty?" I asked. Two years, the miller believed, but it was empty before he came to the mill. "Two years!" said Wyatt; "why, from the look of the place it might have been uninhabited for twenty. The last occupants must have been fond of a jungle life, but perhaps they did not stay there long?" The miller said he did not know much about it; they left before he came there. He spoke with an air of constraint, as if not wishing to pursue the subject; but Wyatt, who was not easily put down, asked if the pictures in the drawing-room represented the late occupants, and the miller replied in the affirmative, but with a marked reserve of manner.

We now turned to go, and as the miller accompanied us to where our boat was moored, a few yards below the bridge, his manner became more free and open. "These stakes are very handy,

gentlemen," he said, as Wyatt stooped to unfasten the painter; and on our expressing concurrence, he went on: "Ay, they come in handy to fasten boats to—they are main handy in more ways than one. These stakes are what I call my bait-lines; I catches some very large bait here, mostly in them deep stakes there, in the middle, under water—dead-bait I calls it. You see this is the way to the ferry over my bridge, and sometimes parties come along here of a night, tight or what not, and they loses their way over my bridge, and falls in, and then instead of floating down, they get caught in these here stakes; and so I sees 'em of a morning, and pulls them out. But it's too late then to send for the doctor."

"Does this often happen?" asked Wyatt.

"Wonderful often; it's wonderful how many folk about here gets tight of a night, and misses the road over my bridge—wonderful many, considering how few folks there be in these parts altogether. 'Tisn't like as if it were London, you see, or even Stainham; there's only villages about here."

"You ought to have a railing put to your bridge," called out Wyatt, as he pushed the boat off, and sent her stern-foremost down the stream.

"So I ought, master—so I ought," chuckled the miller, in reply; "leastways I ought to draw them stakes away, and then I shouldn't be troubled with dead-bait of a morning."

"That old fellow thinks himself a wag," said Wyatt, as we dropped slowly down; "who would have thought an old clown like that would have such a stylish daughter!"

Now it so happened that, before we went down to the boat, I had stopped to have a few words with the miller about the best way of obtaining supplies, and so forth, while Wyatt wandered about the island to find a good place for boating in the morning. Just as I was preparing to follow him, the miller's daughter came up to us to tell her father that she had returned from the cottage, who bade her put the key on the hook over the fireplace; and I took the opportunity to arrange that she should be there to meet me when I expected to arrive the day but one following to take possession. And but that I could make allowance for my friend's infatuation about the fair sex, and his disposition to discover some beauty in every woman he met, undistinguishable by any one else, I should have been astonished at the hyperbole he employed about the miller's daughter. A comely wench enough, no doubt, but certainly to my view the reverse of graceful in either carriage or figure. When I put this to him afterwards, he retorted that nothing better was to be expected from a sedentary misogynist, who knew women only in books.

And now we had made our way past the cottage,

looking cool and quiet if somewhat gloomy and overshaded with its tangled garden and setting of dark groves, and shot out into the main river, which, peaceful though it was, and little tenanted at this hour, seemed quite lively in contrast with the lonely creek, which, with its overhanging trees and bushes, was settling into the gloom of twilight, while the open river still remained light and clear. Passing by Maddeley, where we had stopped coming up, Wyatt rowed on to Stainham. I had not for a long time enjoyed anything so much as this row down, or rather, as sitting in the boat lazily while my friend did the work. This river-life, so near at hand, yet of which I had made no use before, came on me like the revelation of a state, where peace and quiet could be found to refresh and strengthen me for the labour before me. I thought to myself that, sitting in the silence of that cool parlour, the work to be done, which seemed so irksome and repulsive in my London chambers, would become easy again as it used to be in the months gone by, before I had fallen into listless and yet restless habits; and I experienced all the agreeable sense of expectation while partaking of Wyatt's hospitality for the night in his little lodgings at Stainham. As we sat on a bench in front of the house on the river-bank after our light dinner, while he smoked his pipe and I looked out on the tranquil river, I felt how far pleasanter

and more wholesome in my present state would be this mode of life than stopping in London, and that the quiet of my new tenement would be pleasanter and more soothing still. For even at Stainham the laughter of some of the town-folks—shop-boys and their sweethearts, I suppose, out after the day's work—as their boats passed up and down till late into the night, harsh and noisy as it sounded, jarred on my nerves. I wondered it did not annoy Wyatt as it did me; but he retorted that it would not bother me more than it did him if I would only take to smoking.

We returned next morning to town, and I hastened to call on the agents for the cottage, whose address had been given me by the miller. The member of the firm into whose room I was shown made but little objection to the proposed terms. Evidently they would take almost anything to get the house let. The lease, it appeared, was still held by the late occupant; it had come into the hands of the firm as a bad debt. "Who was the late occupant?" I asked, as I rose to go. Well, he was believed to be a person of independent means. "Why did he leave, and where was he now?" That was just what they would like to know. "Was he a married man with a young wife?" Well, Mr Perkins believed he was. "Then," said I, "I suppose those are their likenesses which I saw in the drawing-room." Mr Perkins believed

they would be, but added that he really knew very little about the matter. They both left the place quite suddenly, for some reason unknown, and he had never heard from them since.

The rest of the day and the succeeding one went speedily in the necessary preparations for my country housekeeping; and in the afternoon of the latter, Wyatt and I again set off together, and by the same train as before. For it had been arranged that he should spend a few days with me at the cottage, to see me started, as he called it. I must confess that I would almost have preferred to make the beginning by myself, possessed as I was with perhaps a morbid craving to be alone; and if Wyatt's good spirits could be appreciated at times, they were somewhat oppressive at others. But of course I could not refuse the offer of his company, and I trust he did not detect any ungraciousness in my manner of responding to it.

We stopped as formerly at Maddeley, whither Wyatt had this time sent his boat on in advance, and he rowed me as before up from there to our new quarters, where we arrived while the long summer evening was still young. The fine weather continued; and in this return to the river I experienced a revival of spirits and calmness of mood to which I had for long been a stranger, and I began to look forward with a keen sense of antici-

patory pleasure to a lengthened stay here. Arrived before the lawn, and making fast the boat to the bank, we walked up to the cottage, and found Mrs Bond, my housekeeper, who had come down by train direct at mid-day to the station at the village about a mile and a half from the river, at the back of the cottage, busily engaged in getting things into order, and preparing our supper. My books had been unpacked, and, with a few other articles which had been brought down, they gave already a home-like and comfortable aspect to the dining-room. I may here mention that a difficulty had occurred in the first instance about service, for Mrs Bond was supplemented in my chambers by a char-woman, who came in daily to help, and who was irremovable, and alone she would not suffice for the work of the cottage; but the difficulty had been surmounted by Bond volunteering to bring down with her a niece, now out of service, and staying with her father in town, and who would be glad of this easy place under her aunt for a few weeks. This girl, whom I had not seen, had gone, Bond said, to the village to make some necessary purchases. Eggs, too, it appeared, were a difficulty; the miller's daughters, who had been there great part of the afternoon, had promised to bring some, but had not returned with them. Thereon Wyatt said he would go and fetch them, and set off in the boat, while I lay down on the bank pleasantly occu-

pied in doing nothing. I knew that I could not go to bed till I had completed my prescribed portion of work, or at least spent the time I had prescribed for myself in pretending to make the attempt; but I put off the hour for setting down to it till after supper.

I was lying thus, lazily looking at the lawn and cottage before me, now overcast by the shades of evening, for the sun had set, and in this shady spot it was already dusk, when I saw the figure of a female issuing from the grove by the path which led from the mill, and going towards the house. I am rather short-sighted, nor was it light enough for any one to see very clearly, but the woman, who was evidently tall, and from her figure young, appeared to have a scarf or hood of dark material over her head, which she held with one hand, and which concealed the face. She passed with quick but even step along the little lawn, and entered the cottage by the open door. The miller's daughter with the eggs, I thought — Wyatt will have had his pull for nothing. The young woman might, however, have gone in by the back door. I suppose she has been so accustomed to the empty house that she has forgotten her manners. But I was too lazy to go and intercept Wyatt, who, indeed, presently appeared coming through the eel-pots, and displayed a basket of eggs deposited on the floor of the boat. It was lucky he went for them,

he observed, as he came up and joined me on the bank; the young lady at the mill said it was too late to go back that evening, as her sister was away, and she would have had to come alone, and but for him we should have gone without our omelet. Then it must have been Bond's niece whom I saw just now, I thought—a fine young woman apparently, and with a graceful carriage for a maid-servant.

It was late when we had our supper, served by Bond herself; through the open door we could hear her niece employed upon the plates and dishes in the kitchen. Supper ended, my companion smoked his pipe awhile, and then declared for bed. I felt inclined to follow his example; for although in the habit of keeping late hours, having lost the power of sleeping in the early night, the exercise and the unusual spell of fresh air had made me both tired and sleepy. But I had done no work for the last two days; the enjoyment of the holiday would be lost if I was perpetually oppressed with a weight of arrears pressing on me; let me make a beginning of steady industry to-night, and the effort to work would be all the less next day. So when Wyatt took himself off to bed, I moved the candles to the writing-table before the window—we had forgotten to bring down any lamps—and drew out my manuscript from the drawer. The pencil-note marking the date of last leaving off

was more than a week old; I really must waste no more time; let me get a fresh start made to-night, and I should be able to go on all the more vigorously to-morrow. Wyatt remonstrated. I should lose all the good to be got by coming down here, he said, if I did not keep rational hours. Brain more active at night, was it? That was just the pity. An active brain meant a sleepless night. How could I expect to be fresh in the morning if I did not give myself a fair chance? It was odd I did not see myself what everybody else could see—that my nerves were not in a state for me to take liberties with myself.

I must have expressed myself with unreasonable warmth at the well-meant caution, for Wyatt became quite apologetic about having said anything to hurt my feelings, and so went off to bed, while I sat down and addressed myself to my task.

It was probably the consciousness of the truth of my friend's remark which had made it so unpalatable. It was plain from what he said that the change I had supposed to be apparent to myself only was visible enough to others. But to-night, at any rate, the state of impotence which now usually beset me when I tried to write was quite absent. The sensation of holding a pen no longer set up that nervous irritability, that vain desire to seize upon ideas always eluding me, combined with a loathing for my task, which had of late been

always present with such distressing force. I now felt calm and even pleased with my employment, and could think out my ideas with a distinct sense of mental power. I felt once again something like my old self. Assuredly the cure had begun to take effect already. If I could only maintain this frame of mind I should be able to enjoy my holiday, and yet make good progress with my task. And it was with a sense of infinite relief that I once more resumed a favourite position, which of late I had been obliged to abandon, exchanging the upright chair for an easy one, and putting the candles behind me, so that the light fell on the paper which I held upon a portfolio. In this way I could write fast enough and comfortably, and then letting the book lie on my lap, could stop at times to rest and think.

Yes, it was the charm of the quiet and the country air which had wrought this restoration already. Why limit my stay here to a few weeks? why not stop on till the winter? It will be easy, no doubt, to get an extension of the lease, and perhaps the agent would put the house and the neglected garden into a little better order. A brighter wall-paper alone would make the cottage quite cheerful.

Sitting thus, writing in an easy-chair, the head may rest while one stops to think, and as I lay back thus now and again, sometimes in happy

contemplation of my own improved condition, at others reflecting on the order of my argument, closing my eyes the while, I must have fallen asleep, for when I opened them I did not at first recollect where I was; then I became aware that I had been awakened by a noise. Somebody was moving in the drawing-room on the other side of the little passage,—Wyatt, no doubt. What had he come down-stairs for? But no, it is not Wyatt. It is the rustling of a woman's dress. Mrs Bond perhaps, locking up for the night. Then, as I glanced at the candles nearly burnt out, I knew that it must be long past midnight. I jumped up, curious to know who it could be moving about so late, although the idea of robbers never occurred to me, or if it did was at once dismissed; for who would think of breaking into a house with one of its occupants sitting up with candles before an uncurtained window? As I rose to my feet I again heard the person moving, and stopped to listen. The woman, whoever it is, has come out from the drawing-room, and is passing along the little passage with a light swift step. Now she is going up the stairs. It must be Bond or her niece. What can she want at this hour? and taking up a candle I opened the door and looked out. The staircase, as I have mentioned, was in the recess at the back of the drawing-room opposite the back parlour; at the top was a landing-place, with a door communi-

cating with the servants' rooms over the offices. Bond or her niece, whichever it was, must have passed through this door to her room. She has been quick about it, for I was close behind. But no! for as I was about to follow I notice that the door is both locked and bolted from this side. She must be still somewhere close. But yet there is no hiding-place. The passage, which corresponded with the one below, was bare of furniture. Opposite the head of the staircase was the lumber-room, over the back parlour. This was unlocked, and not without a certain thrill of excitement I opened the door and looked in. It contained an old chair or two, and some boxes, but was otherwise empty.

There remained only the two bedrooms. I listened at the door of Wyatt's, which was over the drawing-room, and then opened it quietly. He was sleeping the sound sleep of a healthy man in good training. My own room was empty.

As thus what seemed at first so simple failed of explanation, my heart began to beat loudly as I found myself in presence of the supernatural. The power of motion left me as I stood with the candle in hand, while suddenly, as connected with what had just happened, there flashed across my mind the recollection of the mysterious figure seen in the afternoon. My knees trembled, and I confess that it was more the feeling of protection from Wyatt's presence on the other side of the door

than my own resolution that enabled me to recover the power of my limbs. Yet withal I felt thoroughly ashamed of my poltroonery, although finding a salve to my conscience in being able to ascribe it to the state of my nerves. Yes, it must be that! I had become excited again over my work, and waking up suddenly I had allowed this foolish hallucination to possess me for the moment, for hallucination it must be. What more absurd than to connect this prosaic house, tenanted by a couple of young men, with a supernatural presence? Yet it was not without an effort and until after some delay that I went down-stairs again. And how to account for the drawing-room door being open? I am certain I heard Mrs Bond close it before she went to bed. I looked in. We had made no use of it as yet, and it bore the same untenanted look it had always worn. Shutting the door, I returned to the dining-room, which was just as I had left it. Blowing out the candle I had left lighted there, and stealthily putting my papers away in the drawer, as if afraid of the sound of my own movements, I went up-stairs again, schooling myself to go slowly, yet feeling every moment more assured as each step brought me nearer to the sound of Wyatt peacefully snoring, and then seeking my own room, turned the key. It was now between one and two o'clock. Had not the cottage been so overcast by the shade of trees,

I have no doubt a faint glimmering of dawn would have been perceptible in the east. Getting into bed and extinguishing the light, I waited in rapt attention for further sound, but nothing could be heard save the dull murmur of the water passing over the weir higher up the river. The distant village clock struck two, and then three, and it was not until the morning light made the paper on the wall distinct, and resolved all the forms in the room into their proper shape, that I fell asleep.

When I awoke it was broad daylight, and the bright sun streaming on the lawn announced another glorious summer day; and although the occurrence of the night at once returned to my mind, the sight of Wyatt in his boating flannels coming up from the river after his bathe, whistling as he went, was enough to banish all sense of misgiving. Equally disillusioning was the prosaic voice of Mrs Bond, outside the door, as she set down the water for my bath, announcing that it was eight o'clock, and that Mr Wyatt wanted breakfast at half-past, in order to catch the 9.30 train. And when I came down-stairs, the view of Wyatt engaged in chopping up some tobacco on the mantelpiece with a penknife, and the cheerful breakfast laid out on the table, was so completely matter-of-fact and commonplace, and at the same time cheerful, that I felt thoroughly ashamed of my nervous alarm of the night. I would put the matter aside, and not

think of it one way or the other. And it did not strike me as odd that when Mrs Bond's niece brought in the kettle to replenish the tea-pot she proved to be a short, stout girl of about sixteen, who looked as if she might yet take a start and grow to a proper height, although later in the day I remembered that this left the appearance of the figure in the garden still unaccounted for.

Wyatt set off for the station across the field after breakfast, promising to return by the half-past five o'clock train, when we would go for a row on the river; and I announced my resolve of setting to work as soon as he had started, so as to make a good beginning and get over my day's task before his return, and thus have all the evening free. But with the whole day before me, it seemed only allowable on this the first day to take a little stroll. Down stream, beyond the other strip of wood which closed in the lawn on this side also, were pleasant meadows, in which the cows were taking their first nip after the mowing. The day was hot, but shade could be got everywhere along the hedgerows. After my long sojourn among stuffy streets, the sense of pleasure at drinking in the fresh country air while wandering among these rich meadows by the water, redolent of beauty as they were, was like a feast; it seemed impossible to tear one's self away, and it was not until a degree of appetite asserted itself to which I had for long been a

stranger, that I returned to the cottage for luncheon. In my absence the post had arrived, bringing a book from Germany, lately published, and bearing on the subject of my studies, which I had been anxiously looking for. I must now make myself master of some of its contents before proceeding with my own writing, to see how far I have been anticipated. The book was ingenious and original, yet happily still leaving room for the statement of my views on the case, and the afternoon passed quickly and pleasantly enough, as I lay on the grass, by the bank of the stream, with the book for a companion, till the time for Wyatt's return. He must have missed his train, however, for up to six o'clock he had not come; and after waiting till all chance of his arriving by it had passed away, I determined to stroll down to the station to meet him, making, however, a detour by the mill. There would be plenty of time for this, as the next train was not due till seven. Even then we should be able to get out on the river before supper.

The shortest way to the mill was by the path through the wood, parallel to the stream, and some fifty yards distant from it. So overgrown was it that the pathway was barely wide enough for one person to pass, and the shrubs, underwood, and briers gave no view of what lay beyond. It was a perfect jungle. When about half-way through, I noticed what appeared to be the trace of another

path turning off to the left—that is, away from the river. The shortest way to the mill was no doubt the one straight on, and this other showed even less sign of being used; but I was seized with a desire to get out of the wood, which this evening was oppressively close, so turned aside. The wood was certainly not so wide as long, and I should probably be able to get out of it the sooner by taking this line.

After pushing my way along for thirty or forty yards, the path opened into a small circular space, explained perhaps by the large oak-tree which checked the undergrowth. Against this were the remains of a rustic seat, consisting of a few planks nailed against the trunk, once painted green, but now fast rotting away. A quiet retreat certainly, and pleasant enough no doubt when this shrubbery was a little better kept; and I wondered whether the young couple whose pictures hung in the drawing-room had ever sat on this bench in their honeymoon days, if they had passed them at the cottage, as seemed probable. But no; I can hardly fancy that gentleman with his hard face, and his curly black whiskers under his square chin, playing the lover, or indulging in much sentiment of any sort. He would expect more attention than he gave, I fancy; and the bride once gained, there would be little of sentiment, or sympathy either, in my gentleman, or I am no judge of character. And

the lady, would she be the sort of woman to take the cue from her husband, and to shrink from uncovering the hard side of her lover—content to make the best of him; to humour him when angry, and to play on his weaknesses in his lighter moods? Again, I am mistaken if that is not the face of a woman charged with pride to measure against his selfishness, and vanity against his conceit,—a woman to scorn and upbraid rather than yield without a struggle. If they came here in their honeymoon days, the place had certainly not been used since; it showed no signs of occupation, or even of having been lately visited; but in the centre of the open circle I noticed that the grass had been removed, and the soil raised, as if a beginning had been made of a flower-bed; but no flowers would flourish in a place so gloomy, and the attempt might well be abandoned almost as soon as begun.

Retracing my steps to what in comparison might be called the main path, I went on to the mill, to find the miller standing as before on the bridge over the mill-dam, smoking his evening pipe. After salutations the miller observed that I need not have come through the wood unless I liked; there was a path round by the orchard and the Nine-Acre—a daylight route, as one might say; and then proceeded to ask if I found myself comfortable at the cottage.

He put the question in an indifferent tone, but

yet I fancied I could detect an expression of curiosity in his face, as if he half expected to hear that I had something to tell.

In company with the miller, and standing there in broad daylight, the alarm of the night had now succeeded to a feeling of indifference, or at most of contempt for myself at allowing my self-possession to be disturbed; but my curiosity was excited by the man's manner, and I asked him somewhat abruptly what he knew about the former occupants of the cottage.

Marking the eagerness of my question, a flash of intelligence passed over the miller's face, but his manner became at once more reserved. They had gone away before he came to the mill, he said, as he had told me before: his brother was here then; he himself was up in Oxfordshire—waving his hand up-stream in the direction indicated—at that time, along with his father. How should he know anything about them?

"Where was his brother now?" I asked; for his evident reserve made me curious.

Well, his brother had emigrated, to be sure—gone to America; and why shouldn't he? He thought he could better himself, and went off; and so he, the speaker, came and took the mill.

Had the man spoken unconcernedly, I should probably have thought no more about it; but I could not help noticing that he seemed to feel I

had a sort of power over him, and that although unwilling to give me information, he was also anxious to avoid the appearance of withholding anything. And this made me ask the further question, how long before he came did the lady and gentleman leave?

"A few days before," he answered, rather sulkily, as I thought; he didn't rightly know how long exactly.

"And they went away quite suddenly?" I continued; and left everything behind them?

"Yes, they went away without giving notice," said the miller, almost repeating my words, and in a sort of defiant manner.

"And left everything behind them?"

And why shouldn't they? They might come back, perhaps, any day, of course. They had the house on lease. But he must go in and have his supper, if I would excuse him. Would I step in and take a glass of anything? Well, then, perhaps I would allow him to take his supper; and so saying, the miller wished me good evening, and turned to go indoors, while I stepped out towards the station, across the fields, unable to form any conclusion about what had passed, but looking forward with a sense of relief to Wyatt's arrival.

As I passed along the path across the fields from the mill to the village, I met a young woman whom, although I am not quick at remembering faces, I

concluded to be the miller's daughter. She gave me a look as of recognition, but passed on without speaking, and I turned round to look after her. Yes, it must have been her I saw; she is tall and slight, although there is certainly nothing graceful or gliding in her gait; she walks as awkwardly as most rustics; it must have been the dim light of evening that threw a glamour over her movements. And under a sudden impulse I called to her, and she stopped and came back a few steps to meet me.

I asked her if it was she who had been down to the cottage on the evening of our first visit.

Yes, she said; she and her sister had been down there that afternoon, to lock it up.

"Your sister?" I asked,—for I remembered that the miller had spoken of sending only one of his daughters. "Then you did not go alone? I thought your father had sent you by yourself? He said so."

"So he did, sir, truly; but my sister was going to the village, so she went along with me. We didn't say nothing to father about it, because he would have said it was nonsense. But I beg your pardon, sir, I must be getting home," and she turned to go on.

"Stay one moment," I said; and then, as she stopped and turned round again, I asked, "Where was your sister when you came out by yourself through the wood?"

"Me come out by the wood!" cried the girl, her mouth opening wide, and her eyes and face alike expressing astonishment; "why, I wouldn't go through the wood for worlds. I should expect to see——"

"What would you expect to see?" I asked eagerly, interrupting her.

"I beg your pardon, sir," she answered, her manner changing abruptly to one of caution, "I didn't mean anything. I beg your pardon, sir, but father would be very angry if he knew I had been talking to you about such things. I wish you good evening, sir," and bobbing me a curtsey, she turned on her heel and pursued her way to the mill.

Had this conversation passed near the cottage itself, or the grove, or while the events of the night had left their first impression, I believe I should have been startled by this corroboration of my own alarms. As it was, in the broad daylight of these pleasant meadows, with the village and railway station in full view, it was not difficult to succeed in putting aside all sensation of uneasiness; but I could not help looking forward with extreme satisfaction to the return of Wyatt, to whom I determined to communicate my experiences of the night, not without a strong suspicion that my story would be received with considerable ridicule.

Although the sun had not yet set, it was now hidden behind a bank of clouds which had been

gathering during the afternoon. The air was still and oppressive; and, never a good walker, I slackened my usual pace for the heat, and thus had the mortification to see the down-train arrive and pass on before I could reach the station. When I got there the passengers by it had already dispersed. As Wyatt did not expect me to meet him, of course he would not have waited for me, and I set off to overtake him along the other footpath, which led also across fields, direct to the cottage. But I could not make him out ahead of me, and on reaching the cottage I found that he had not arrived there. He must have got out at Maddeley, the next station before our own, and be coming up by the river, I made sure; and I wandered down along the bank, in hopes of meeting him, till warned to return by the rolling of distant thunder, and the large drops of rain now beginning to fall.

As I approached the house it was almost dark; the wood beyond it looked more dreary than ever. I almost wondered, looking at it now, that I should have ever ventured to enter it; and I looked uneasily towards it, half expecting to see some mysterious form issuing from its gloomy recesses. But nothing appeared this time, and I hurried indoors, to find a telegram on the table which had been brought from the village in my absence. It was from Wyatt. The governor had sent him into Essex on some business, and he should not be back in

time to return that evening, but would come down by the early train in the morning to breakfast, and take a whole holiday.

The feeling of discomfiture produced at first by the news of this desertion, and that I was destined to spend the evening alone, was succeeded by a sense of the absurdity, to say the least, of allowing myself to feel nervous, as I heard the cheerful noise of Mrs Bond and her niece engaged in preparing supper in the kitchen. The rattle of plates, and the chatter of their voices, were enough to exorcise any demon of timidity and low spirits; and I was able, after a brief toilet, to find complete distraction from such foolish thoughts in the newspapers of the day, which Hannah, the girl, had brought from the village this evening. It was too hot, and I was too tired after my unwonted exercise, to eat much dinner; but I enjoyed all the more the tea which shortly succeeded that meal, and of which, although warned by my doctor to abstain from that form of refreshment at night, I drank even more freely than usual. Some rain fell during dinner, but only the edge of the storm came our way; the rumbling of the thunder could still be heard. The night was still and oppressive; and the windows, although wide open, seemed to let in no air. Awhiles I read, putting off the task of the night from one half-hour to another, hardly disturbed by the inmates of the kitchen taking their supper after

mine, and talking, after the fashion of servants, as loudly as if they had been calling to each other from different rooms, instead of being seated at the same table. At another time the noise would have been offensive; just now it was the reverse of disagreeable. About half-past ten o'clock Mrs Bond came in to remove the tea-things; and then, after fastening the drawing-room windows and locking the hall-door, she looked in again to know if I wanted anything more before she went to bed, and wishing me good night, retired.

I was on the point of calling her back, to tell her to open the door of communication at the top of the stairs, but for very shame did not do so; I could not think of any excuse: to say anything about precautions against fire would have sounded ridiculous. I heard her make fast the door leading from the hall into the offices; then there was a certain amount of talking and shutting of doors and windows, followed by steps going up the back staircase, and then the little house became quite still.

Not until then, and I felt absolutely alone, did the terror of, I knew not what, against which I had been struggling all day with more or less success, return in full force. Above all, while trying to reassure myself by setting down what I thought I had seen to disordered nerves, there came on my mind, with renewed force, the recollection of the fact that it was not I alone who had to deal with

the unaccountable. It could not be the state of my health which made me imagine only that I had heard Wyatt speak of the figure passing into the house from the garden. I was sure he had told me of it. And although the thing had not surprised him, he did not know that the explanation of the appearance which he had suggested, failed altogether to explain it. No! During bright daylight the notion of the supernatural might be dismissed as foolishness; but in my present solitude the possibility seemed real enough. The very silence seemed horrible. I was ready to fancy sounds all round me. But nothing broke the silence. If only Wyatt had been here! or even if the doors in the house had been left open, so that there might have been the sense of security from proximity of other living beings! If only Mrs Bond's hearty snore could have reached my ears!

Thus I remained for a while under the influence of the terror that possessed me, of I knew not what, yet withal thoroughly ashamed to confess my cowardice, even to myself, till at last, summoning up courage, I lighted the chamber candlestick, and opening the door, placed it on a bracket in the hall, and then quickly returning, but leaving the door ajar, addressed myself to my papers. I had forgotten, as I have mentioned, to bring down any lamps with me, and had commissioned Wyatt that morning to buy three or four cheap ones and bring

them down. The darkness of the house during the event of the past night, when the single candle was hardly reflected by the dingy walls of the passage, had contributed not a little to the horror of the situation, and I had resolved to light up all the rooms and passages this evening with a brightness that would banish all chance of a recurrence of such a thing. The non-arrival of these lamps had been almost as keen a disappointment as the absence of Wyatt himself; but even a single candle burning in the hall would be something.

At first the very click of the pen heightened my sense of insecurity,—it seemed to challenge a response with the unseen world; but at last the sound became familiar and even soothing. The chime of the village clock at midnight came to remind me that human beings were not so far off; the rattle of a train in the distance passing down the line was even more grateful; I became impressed with a sense of the incompatibility of such matter-of-fact things as railway trains with supernatural apparitions; and for the first time that evening I had succeeded in composing my mind, and concentrating my attention on the work before me. My brain assumed something of its normal activity, and I was getting interested in my work, instead of feeling it to be the distasteful labour which of late had oppressed me. I felt as if I could go on with it all the night through. Say what the doctors

might about the importance for health of working only by day, there was nothing like night-work for cultivating the play of fancy and imagination.

Thus I felt for the moment, rather than distinctly thought out the idea, while the busy pen plied its task. But what is that which suddenly makes the hand fall nerveless on the paper, and leaves me bereft of motion save for the quick beating of my heart?

Some one is moving in the drawing-room opposite.

Instinctively I felt that, be it what it may, it is the presence of the night before.

Now I hear the drawing-room door open; the rustling of a dress in the passage.

I started to my feet. At first it seemed as if my limbs would refuse to perform their office; but seizing a candle, I staggered to the door, and opening it wide looked out.

Besides the candle I held in my hand, the light which I had placed in the passage was still burning, so that, dark and dingy as the passage was, it was yet lighted up; and at the other end, in the act of turning to mount the stairs, is the same apparition as had appeared the previous night; the same female figure that had entered the house from the wood. Tall, slight, and erect, robed in dark clothing, the face averted, and the head partly covered by a mantle, the figure was as clearly seen as if it had been daylight. Seen only for a moment, as, passing up the staircase, it disappears from my view.

Surely it must be a real human being, for I can hear the old staircase creak as it makes its way up. Had I stopped to think, I could not have gone on; but under a sudden impulse I too hurried up the staircase after the apparition. Again there is no sign of any moving thing. The landing-place and passage are void of occupant; the passage-door is locked. I peep into the box-room, and again find it empty. There remain only the rooms of Wyatt and myself; and I enter each of these in turn, almost expecting as I do so to find myself face to face with the thing. Seeing nothing in each case, I venture to examine them carefully; but there are no hiding-places; the search is soon ended.

My first impulse after this is to knock loudly at the passage-door and awake the two women; even the sound of my own voice would be a distraction in the horrid silence. But even in my terror I was restrained by shame. Even if they thought me serious, they would put down my impression to mere nervous imagination. Mrs Bond would think she had more right than ever to tax me with keeping late hours and living on unwholesome diet.

It is an effort to go out again into the passage, still more to go down-stairs; but I manage to do so, and also to look into the drawing-room, the door of which is open, while it was certainly shut before. The room itself shows no signs of having been

visited. There is no key to the door; but shutting it I return to the dining-room, the lighted candle in which invites me to enter, and sitting down again I try to compose myself. Surely it must be my disordered health that has conjured up this vision. I was not always such a coward. It must have been mere illusion that I saw something. But no! I was never more convinced of the reality of anything than of the reality of this object. And yet if it be a visitant from the other world, why should I be thus fearful about it? Why should I not boldly face it? I *will* do so if it comes again; if I hear this sound again on the other side of the door, I will rush out and confront the figure, and intercept it: if incorporeal, it will vanish perhaps; if it be real, I need not fear to grasp it. What a change has come over you, Philip Merton, that you should be arguing in this way about it, and trying to screw your courage up to the sticking point! Be yourself, be a man, and do not be afraid of a spirit, if spirit it be. Why should it harm you?

By some such way of reasoning I did succeed in composing myself sufficiently to take up my pen again, and make an effort to continue my writing; not very successfully indeed, for while the hand was busy the ear was on the strain to catch the sound if it should recur.

And while in this state, the hand falls helpless, the cold sweat bursts out, the very blood seems to

curdle within me, as I am again startled by the sound of something moving, this time close to me, outside the open window, just on the other side of the table. Good God! why am I to be tormented with these horrid visions? This time it is the figure of a man. The light of the candle comes between us, so that the figure is only obscurely made out in the darkness—the figure of a tall, dark man. I can just distinguish a sort of cloak covering the figure, and the glance of a searching eye under a slouched hat.

I sank back speechless and powerless in my chair. I felt my heart stand still, then begin beating again as if it would burst.

Suddenly a sound issued from the apparition. It spoke.

"How long have you been here?"

The voice, although low and cautious, sounded harsh and hollow, but it reassured me. This was no apparition. This at least was a human being. And sinister though the man looked, the presence of one was a sort of comfort.

I made no answer, for my voice literally stuck in my throat; nor did I want to show the fear that possessed me.

"I could not help myself," continued the voice; "I stayed away; I wandered here and there. I tried to get rid of it; but I had to come back after all. I saw that you were alone, and I thought I

would come in. You have got no evidence against me," the man continued, moving back as I stood up, for at the continued sound of the human voice my prostration had ceased. "You have got no evidence against me. I don't want to hurt you," he added, as I started back on the threatening attitude he assumed. "I don't want to hurt any one. I have got enough of that on my mind to last me my life. Look here," he went on, in the same stealthy voice; "I have been tramping all the day, and I'm damnably wet and thirsty. Haven't you got a drop of spirits in the place?"

It seemed to me from the man's manner that he had been drinking already; but to be engaged in the homely office of supplying liquor was an agreeable diversion from the occupation of the night. Wyatt's brandy-bottle was on the sideboard. I took it up, and was about to mix some for him with water, but he whispered to me impatiently from the window to hand him the bottle and glass. He poured out nearly half a tumbler, and drank it off.

"How long have you been here?" he repeated, as he set down the glass on the window-sill. "Only two days!" he said, as if to himself, after I had answered him. "So if I had come sooner I should have found the place shut up! Only two days! Only two years since we two were living here, she and I; and the place doesn't seem much

changed. Only two years!" he continued, turning round, and again speaking as if to himself. "Only two years since she and I were here together! it seems like two hundred. Look here," he continued, turning round again and stepping over the window-sill into the room; "I want just to see the other room. I have come several thousand miles to see it, I tell you. Yes, I know the way well enough;" and, taking up one of the candles, he led the way into the drawing-room. I followed him.

He looked round the little room, casting a curious look on the floor by the hearth, as if he expected to see something on the faded carpet, and then, advancing towards the fireplace, held the candle up to the picture of the woman above it, before which he stood gazing, the expression on his face a strange mixture of terror and ferocity.

As he did so, the light fell also on the portrait of the man. I saw then who my visitor was. Altered though the features were—brute though he looked now, unkempt and sodden, and disfigured by drink—it was still the same face; and he had been a fine-looking man once.

A few moments he stood thus, his hand trembling as he held up the candle. Then he turned the light on his own picture, and looking back on me with a scowl mixed with a drunken leer, said, "Damn it, drink and bad nights change a fellow, don't they? But I was a good-looking chap enough then."

Just what I was thinking.

"Yes; and Judith was a fine woman too, and no mistake. We were a handsome couple as you would wish to see. And I never, never cared for any woman as I cared for her. She could be pleasant enough, too, when she liked. O Judith, Judith, my girl!" he continued, turning again to the picture, "why couldn't you keep that damned temper of yours under a bit? You might have been here now, and me too, quiet and happy, instead of wandering about the world, afraid to show my face anywhere, regularly gone to the dogs." And he stood looking at the woman's face remorsefully.

"Look here," he said, turning round fiercely to me, although still speaking under his breath, "I didn't pretend to be better than other fellows. The women used to run after me, and how could I help being a bit gay? She knew that when she took me. But I would have treated her well all the same, if she would have taken me as I was. What right had she to open my letters, I should like to know? A man who has lived gay can't get square and right all of a sudden."

"That's how it happened," he continued, after a pause, as if he were trying to restrain an insuperable impulse to speak out; "a nice thing for a man, isn't it, when he comes home after a day's worry, and wants to have a quiet time of it, to find

his wife behaving like a perfect devil? That's how it happened," he went on, in a hoarse whisper, while the foam stood on his dry parched lips. "That's where she stood, there, behind the door, when she pulled out the letter—my letter from the other woman, and marked private—and shrieked at me till they might have heard her up at the village; called me a perjured villain, and said she wouldn't let me touch her again. I let her go on for a bit," continued he, with a cunning leer; "I knew it was no good stopping her in her tantrums; and it was a bit hard on her to find she was not the only woman who thought me a fine man. Then she went away up-stairs, and I thought it was all over. Oh! why didn't she stay there? I thought she would go to bed and sulk a bit, and that we should make it up in the morning. But no; down she came again, and walked up just here," dragging me back, and pointing to the hearth, "and began again just as bad as ever. Declared she would go off at daybreak, and that that other fellow was ready to receive her, and that she had always cared for him more than me. I wasn't going to stand that, you know. What fellow would that had any respect for himself? I told her to hold her tongue or I'd make her; I told her she was telling a damned lie, and she knew it. Oh! why would she go on? Look here; on my oath, I didn't mean to hurt her—I only meant to frighten

her a bit. I thought if she found out my rough side she would learn to hold her tongue. Look here," he went on, in a hoarse whisper, pulling me further back, and holding out the candle with his other hand; "that's where she stood, looking a very devil in her rage and beauty, just by the picture; and there," he said, pointing downwards, "is where she fell. I didn't mean it, I say; I swear I didn't mean it. Her head struck the fender. She never moved again. And I've been punished for it, and she knows it. She will never give me any rest as long as she lies where she does. Look here," he went on again; "how could I help doing what I did afterwards? How was I to go and tell? How could I prove it was an accident? I didn't mean to hurt her. Come away from this," he continued, wiping the sweat from his brow with his sleeve, and moved back into the other room, whither I followed him.

The brandy-bottle was still on the table. He poured out another large glass, and drank it off. Far from making him more drunk, it seemed to steady him. "You must know the whole of it," he said, as he put down the glass. "Come along with me. You're not afraid, are you?" he said, with a sneering smile, as he noticed my sudden drawing back; "I wouldn't hurt a fly to-night. Come along, I must make a clean breast of it, or I shall go mad. Come along," and so saying,

he stepped out into the veranda, pulling me by the arm.

But I made no difficulty about following him, and he let go my sleeve. I knew whither he was leading. He said truly that I had been frightened at first, but I was so no longer.

He led the way across the lawn to the grove. Dark though the night was, he made as if by instinct for the path that led through it. The wet leaves showered their drops on us as we brushed through the narrow passage. Suddenly he stopped as if in doubt about his way. I knew what he was looking for. "Here it is," he whispered, and turned up the narrow pathway to the glade which I had visited the previous afternoon.

We reached the glade, knowing that we were there more by the freedom from the pressure of shrubs and branches than from the sight, although the clouds had now passed away, and it was a starlight night.

"Here is the place," said the man, grasping my arm, and speaking in a whisper close to my ear. "No; don't step on it; keep back; perhaps she hears us: there, down there, just in front, is where it is. I carried her there myself, that very night. All night long I dug. It was just such a night as this, as hot as hell. And all the time I was digging she lay there and never moved; and I covered in the grave, and she never moved; and then I ran

off, and wrote to say we had both gone away suddenly together. She never moved then, all the time I was at work, but she never leaves me alone now. I used to think it was all fancy, and the brandy; but it is just as bad when I am sober. Hush! perhaps she is listening to us now; but she never comes except when I am alone.

"Now you know why I wanted you. The thing that lies under here must not be allowed to stay there. I shall know no peace till it is moved away, and put into the churchyard; then, perhaps, she will leave me alone. You must promise me that. You'll do it for your own sake, I know. I shall be far away again, but I shall hear about it. I shall know if it is done; and if it isn't, I shall come back and trouble you again. Come away, we have been here long enough." And so saying, the man turned and led the way back to the main path. That reached, he made as if about to start off, but stopping again, seized me by the hand, and went on.

"I haven't told you all yet. There was one man nearly found me out. I was coming out of this infernal place, just at daybreak, when I met a man, —it was the miller. My plan for concealment was discovered. He would know that I was alone,— that she was not with me. No! I didn't kill him, though I was minded to; I got him to leave his mill, and come right away to America then and there. He didn't know what I was after in this

wood, and I never let him come here to find out. I never lost sight of him till I got him out of the place; but he suspects, and I have nearly ruined myself trying to keep him quiet. But he may blab now if he likes, and he won't get any more out of me. I am not going back there again to lead that cursed life."

Then he added, "Now you had better go back to the house; I aint afraid of your following me, but mind you keep quiet till morning, or it will be worse for you. I know my way out of this." And so saying, he passed on in the direction of the mill, and in an instant I felt rather than saw that I was alone.

To hasten instantly out of the wood and regain the open lawn was my first impulse. Thence I could see the light still burning in the parlour, but I had not courage to enter the house again, still less could I stay where I was and brave another meeting with the apparition. I was now standing in the very spot where I had first seen it, as it moved from the wood into the house; and as soon as I remembered this, I hurried towards the field at the back of the cottage, and so by the path across the field to the village. In these open spaces, tenanted by the quiet cattle, whose forms could be made out recumbent on the grass, there could be no pursuit of these horrors.

By the time I reached the village the first ray

of dawn could be made out, and it was soon light. And with the light my courage returned, although the anxiety possessed me not the less strongly to pursue the mystery to an end, if only to satisfy myself that all the scenes I had passed through were not merely the creations of a disordered and enfeebled brain. Faint though I was and weary, my head seemed clear enough, and presently a draught of milk, obtained from an early milkman, gave me some strength. If Wyatt really came as he had promised, by the first train, he would be here at seven o'clock.

The sun rose bright and unclouded, but I had still a long time to wait. Under different circumstances, there would have been abundant scope for enjoyment in watching the gradual birth of another lovely summer's day—all nature refreshed by the night's rain. But now I was only weary and impatient.

The train arrived. Wyatt stepped out, the only passenger for this station. He quite started on seeing me; my face and appearance evidently reflected the excitement I had gone through.

To his anxious inquiry, what was the matter with me, I could only reply by urging him to press homewards. He should see and judge for himself what was the matter. And at last Wyatt, seeing my condition, gave up questioning, and we pursued our course in silence.

Entering the vegetable garden by the back gate, we came to the little tool-shed. A spade was lying there which I took up and gave to Wyatt, and taking a hoe myself, I led the way to the grove. Arrived at the little glade, I pointed to the mound in the centre, and beginning to ply the hoe, urged him to dig too.

He set to work; but after a few strokes I was compelled to stop from want of strength. Never since childhood had I felt so weak and helpless. Leaning on the hoe, gasping for breath, I urged Wyatt to his task.

He dug away, casting every now and then a doubting look at me, as if he questioned my sanity. The morning was hot, and Wyatt, though a sturdy fellow, began to feel the strain of the unwonted exercise, taken while fasting; and at last he stopped, and leaning on his spade, looked sulkily at me, as if to say that he had humoured me enough.

I replied to his look of reproach by taking the spade from him, and stepping into the hole which he had made, resumed the work of digging. But my labour did not accomplish much; nerves and muscles were both equally relaxed.

Wyatt stood watching my feeble efforts for a time, wiping his brow with his shirt-sleeve. At last, observing that if this tomfoolery was to go on, it had better be done by him, he stepped into the

hole again, and taking the spade from me, set to work.

But he too was tired, and did not work with a will; he began grumbling to himself as he dug, speaking in an undertone.

Suddenly he stopped digging, and looked down eagerly. His spade had caught in something.

It was a piece of rag of some sort. The spade severed it easily, and a fragment was thrown up with the earth, and lay exposed on the top of the soil. Another portion could be seen still in the hole, mixed with the loose earth.

My companion's listless manner had left him; he dug now with a will, throwing up large spadefuls quickly.

Presently the spade again met with an obstacle. Something stayed below, when the loose earth was thrown up, projecting above what was left.

Is it a stone or a piece of decayed wood?

Wyatt stopped digging and stooped down to look at it, but drew back again quickly with an exclamation of disgust.

I drew close to the spot, and kneeling, looked down too. The thing was not wood. It was the end of a human foot: the long bones could be seen, with some decomposed flesh still hanging to them.

Wyatt looked at me for a time, in silence; then he got out of the grave, and laying down the spade, said, "We had better not deal with this matter

alone; let us get somebody else to go on with the job. Let us go and call the miller."

He put on his coat and led the way. I followed him—taking a last glance round to where the silent witness of the foul deed protruded from the soil—along the narrow path through the grove, till we got into the open meadow. Then we walked along side by side.

"Not now," said my friend, as I essayed to speak; "tell me all about it by-and-by, when you are cooler. I beg your pardon for having doubted you."

We walked on in silence. As we drew in sight of the mill, we saw a couple of persons, women, standing on the bridge which crossed the race. They were the miller's daughters. They hardly noticed us as we came up; they were staring in rapt attention, looking down towards the stream where the stakes were, at the tail of the race.

As we came up with them, the miller appeared from his house carrying a rake and a rope.

"Another drunken fellow, I suppose," he said, "missed his way over the bridge last night;" and so saying, passed down the bank towards the stakes. We followed him with the girls.

As we approach the spot a dark limp mass can be made out in the water, swayed idly to and fro by the eddy of the stream.

It needed not to see the bloated features, as they

dragged the body out of the water, to tell me who it was. I knew from the first moment that I was once more face to face with the visitant of that dread night.

*Note by Mr Wyatt.*—The foregoing account was the last thing my poor friend wrote, and finding it among his papers, carefully corrected, as if intended for publication, I believe I am justified in publishing it for the benefit of his estate. The truth of it is of course sufficiently corroborated by the discovery of the body of the woman, precisely as described, and of the drowned man, and the interest which the matter excited at the time will be fresh in the recollection of many. Of the occurrences of the night there was no other witness than himself, and the reader must judge how far it was coloured by the condition of his health, the melancholy state of which has been only too faithfully portrayed in his narrative. I can only say that to the day of his death, which happened only a few weeks after the events described, my poor friend always asserted in the strongest terms the truth of what he has written; and the only shade which passed over our friendship during his last illness arose from my having ventured to express somewhat too strongly my doubt whether he was not labouring under a delusion. I am bound in candour to add that his belief in the apparition

seems to have been fully shared by the female occupants of the mill, although expressed by them under great reserve. The miller's connection with his brother, the former occupant of the mill, was never fully cleared up; and I cannot but corroborate my friend's account of my having myself seen the female figure passing from the house to the wood, exactly as he describes it, although I should be sorry to say with equal confidence that the appearance was not susceptible of rational explanation.—T. W.

The Retreat, Stainham Lock,
*October* 1878.

# A RIDE FOR LIFE.

[*MAGA.* February 1878.]

IT was on the last day of December 1857, that the regiment of Sikh irregular cavalry with which I served during the Mutiny in India was marching southwards from Meerut towards Futtehghur, in order to effect a junction with a strong force which was advancing in a north-westerly direction from Cawnpore. Our force had reached within ten miles or so of a small town named Bewah, where the old Grand Trunk Road branches off towards Futtehghur. The force under Lord Clyde, with which we were seeking to effect a junction, was known to be within some thirty-five or forty miles of us; but owing to the disturbed state of the country, it had been hitherto impossible to ascertain with any accuracy its precise position. Between eleven and twelve o'clock that night, I was awakened from a sound sleep in my tent by the adjutant of my corps. He told me that I must get up at once, as news had come that a strong party of rebels had advanced to Bewah,

and was now probably between our column and the one with which we were wishing to effect a junction; that there was good reason to believe that the rebels had surprised and cut off a picket of our own regiment, which had been sent out under an officer that morning; and that consequently an order had just been issued that another strong patrol or reconnoitring party was to start off at once, in order to ascertain the truth of these reports, if possible—to find out if any body of the enemy occupied the road in front of us—and to pick up generally what information it could. As I was the next officer for duty, it devolved upon me to take command of the party, which was to consist of about four-and-twenty men. Hastily ordering one of my horses to be saddled, I proceeded to make myself ready for a start. The supposed and also the possible whereabouts of the enemy were pointed out to me on a map of the district, and my instructions were clear and precise. I was to steal along the road to the front as quietly and cautiously as possible; to pick up any men of our own patrol whom I might fall in with; to avoid any engagement with the enemy, and to send or bring back exact information of his strength and position as soon as possible. After carefully loading a double-barrelled pistol which I carried, I proceeded to inspect the men and horses of my party, who were already drawn

up in readiness a few yards from my tent. Finding them all satisfactorily equipped, I put myself at their head and we moved silently off. It was a serene, bright, and very cold night, and the moon was shining forth with that intensely clear brilliancy only seen in the tropics, as we passed down the main street of the camp, where the troops were sleeping quietly in their tents ranged on each side, and struck into the road along which our intended route lay. After proceeding for about a mile and a half, we approached the last outposts of the camp, and were sharply challenged by the sentries in succession as we passed. After a few minutes' conversation *en passant* with the infantry officer in command of the picket, I passed on. As I did so, I felt that I might very probably require to have all my wits about me in order to execute the task I was instructed to carry out. After taking all necessary precautions to avoid surprise, I made my men follow each other in single file on each side of the road where the ground was soft, and where, therefore, the sounds of their horses' footfall was not audible, except at a few yards' distance. Advancing thus cautiously along, I proceeded without seeing or hearing anything to indicate the presence of a rebel force for eight or nine miles. *En route* I passed through a couple of miserable villages, which appeared to be deserted, as there was not a soul to be found in them. Sud-

denly the native officer of the party which I had thrown out as scouts ahead rode up to say that two men lay dead on the way about half a mile ahead, and that he had identified them as belonging to our patrol, which had been sent out in the morning, and of which nothing had since been heard. Giving orders to my party to follow on quietly, I galloped forward with the man who had brought the news, towards the spot where the bodies were. Sure enough, there they lay, evidently just as they had fallen. One of them, a fine powerfully built Sikh, was stretched full length across the road. He had been partially stripped, and lay in a pool of his own blood, his body covered with gaping sword-wounds, while his sabre, of which he had evidently retained his grip almost to the last, was close to his clenched hand, showing that he had fought desperately with his foes to the end. The other man lay under a tree a few yards off, on the side of the road, and had evidently been killed while trying to escape towards our camp; for he had been shot in the back, and had only one sabre-cut visible on him—viz., right across his throat. All this we could discover by the bright moonlight. One of my men had meanwhile lit a native oil torch (though there was, indeed, but little need of it), and as its glare threw a fitful light over the scene, I laid my hand upon one of the dead men, as it was necessary for me

to guess how long it was since they had been killed.

Both men were quite cold, and had therefore been dead some hours. It was now but too evident that our patrol sent out in the morning had been attacked; but what had been the fate of the remainder of the party it was impossible to say. Directing my men to place the dead bodies under a tree by the side of the road, I waited till the main body of the patrol came up. In a few minutes they made their appearance, and on reaching the spot where we were, they busied themselves in scrutinising, by the help of the bright moonlight, the upturned faces of the two dead men. One trooper, after a short scrutiny, dismounted, and kneeling down close to one of the corpses, made a hurried exclamation, and broke out into frantic protestations of grief upon recognising his own brother as one of the slain. I was obliged, in order to silence him, to remind him that it was neither the time nor the place to indulge his grief, but that all he could do was to avenge his death, if he had the chance. He became silent at once, and placing his hand upon his sabre, swore solemnly that if we met any of the rebels, they should taste his vengeance—a sentiment warmly re-echoed by the troopers around. Mounting my horse, we again went forward in the same cautious manner as before. For about two miles we proceeded quietly enough, when suddenly the same native

officer whom I had before sent on ahead, came galloping back with the news that about half a mile in front of us two more men of our patrol that had been sent out in the morning had been found badly wounded, but still sensible. I again galloped on ahead to the spot where the men were. They were sitting up, supported by the trunk of a tree, one of them so badly wounded as to be almost unconscious. The other man, though weak from loss of blood, was able to speak, and from him I endeavoured to get a coherent account of what had occurred. At last, by dint of much cross-questioning and examination, I managed to extract the following facts: M——, the officer who had been sent out in command of the patrol in the morning, had got as far as Bewah without molestation, and had there learnt that the British force under Lord Clyde, which was advancing to meet us from Futtehghur, was still about twenty miles ahead. Being well mounted himself, he had picked out a couple of men to attend him, with the intention, if possible, of reaching the British camp, and so opening up a communication with our column. Before leaving his men in Bewah, he had given strict orders that they were to keep a sharp look-out for themselves, and to keep men patrolling up two or three cross-roads that led out of the village. Regarding him and his escort, nothing more had been heard; but as the day wore on, and no sign of any rebels ap-

peared, our Sikh troopers, "mere Asiatics," slackened in their vigilance, the patrols returned, the men dismounted—some of them even unsaddled their horses—and repairing to the *caravanserai* of the town, prepared to cook their evening meal. Suddenly, just as it was growing dusk, about five or six o'clock, they were surprised by a band of fugitive rebels from a place called Etawah, who had been that day defeated by another small British force which had been operating in the neighbourhood. These rebels, finding a detachment of Sikh troopers in the village, who were evidently taken by surprise, immediately set upon any of them whom they came across. Some of our men hid themselves in the village, and others, jumping on their horses, had, I was assured, made good their escape. Others, like those whom we found on the road *en route*, had been pursued for several miles, and had been killed and wounded in their flight. As to whether any of the rebels still occupied Bewah, the man could give me no information at all.

Finding himself surrounded by the enemy on all sides, he had jumped on his horse, barebacked, and fled for his life, and was hotly pursued, overtaken, and left for dead in the road. This was all that could be elicited from him. Telling a man of my party to remain behind with him and his comrade (who was now almost past praying for), and to do

the best for him that he could under the circumstances, I set myself for a moment to think. I was somewhat in a dilemma. Did the rebels occupy Bewah or not; and if so, what was the strength and composition of their force? It was most important for me to ascertain this, as it was one of the main points which I had been instructed to find out. Again, what had become of M—— and his escort? Had they fallen into the hands of the rebels, or had they made good their way to Lord Clyde's camp? The difficulty was how to ascertain these points without being seen and attacked. After a few moments' consideration, I resolved to go forward with four picked troopers as near as I could to the town, and trust to the chapter of accidents to find out something. I therefore directed the main body of my party to conceal themselves under some trees about half a mile from the town at the side of the road, while I and my four men started off on our mission. Nearer and nearer we approached the little town, expecting every moment to be challenged. At length I halted, and listened anxiously for any of the usual sounds that might betoken the presence of troops in the place. No, not a sound. We therefore advanced confidently on into the town, or rather village, which we found deserted and empty. Indeed the only noise that greeted our ears was the re-echo of our horses' hoofs as we marched through the street. Not an

inhabitant to be seen. So far, so good; the enemy was certainly not there. At length, as I turned a corner in the street, a man started out from under a house-door, where he had been crouching, and ran off in front of us, finally turning down a side street. I shouted to him in Hindustani to stop, but he took no heed; and as I urged my horse in pursuit, he disappeared through a gate. Hastily following him, I found myself in a courtyard overlooked by the windows of half-a-dozen houses. Through the chinks of the door of one of these dwellings lights could plainly be discerned. When fairly in the yard, I could not help glancing anxiously around, and feeling how easily I and my four men might be shot down from the upper windows, in the event of there being any of the enemy within. I was, however, determined, if possible, to gain admittance. I therefore dismounted, and beating loudly at the door, demanded to be let in. My men meanwhile had cocked their carbines and were ready for any emergency that might arise. There was no answer at first to my summons, but I could hear through the wooden door a hurried consultation in whispers going on inside, and at length a voice, tremulous with fear, demanded who we were and what was our business. As soon as I said that I was an English officer, the door was opened at once, and I found three men sitting over the embers of a wood fire. I demanded of them who they were, and

which of them was the man whom I had seen run into the house. Upon this a respectable-looking native came forward, and assured me he was an *employé* in the intelligence department of the British force under Lord Clyde, and that he had been sent to see if he could gain any news of the whereabouts of the force to which I belonged. In proof of his assertions he produced several official documents, and implored my protection, adding that his reason for running away was that he mistook me and my party for some of the rebel horsemen, who, he said, had sacked the place on their way through a few hours previously. His fears for his personal safety were not altogether without foundation; for on glancing behind me I saw that two of my Sikh troopers who had followed me into the house, were standing behind me with drawn sabres and eyeing him with great suspicion, and evidently prepared to cut him down at the least sign from me. In truth they were apparently somewhat disappointed at the turn affairs had taken, and at there being no one to kill in expiation of the blood of their own comrades. One of them, indeed, went so far as to remind me that the documents which the man produced might be forged, with various other suggestions of a similar kind. Ordering him to sheathe his sabre, and to hold his tongue, I proceeded to question this native; and I found out from him a good deal that I wanted to know. None of the rebel troops

were left in the village, as they had passed through in hot haste in their flight from Etawah, thinking that they were pursued by the cavalry of the British force which had defeated them. (This, however, was not the case.) But of M—— and his escort he had heard nothing, nor did he know of the present whereabouts of the rebel troops. Upon hearing this, I sent back one of my troopers for the rest of my men whom I had left behind; and on their arrival I placed them in the *caravanserai* just outside the town, to which was attached a small courtyard with high walls, and with a gate at the back, by which they could beat a retreat back towards our camp in the event of their being hard pressed; and I cautioned the native officer to keep a sharp look-out and to patrol the roads leading to his post. Meanwhile I determined myself to press on in company with two picked men to ascertain, if possible, the precise whereabouts of the enemy's camp, and also, if possible, to find out what had became of M——, about whom I was not at all easy in my mind. I was not, however, without hope that his good luck and his readiness of resource would carry him safely through his daring and perilous ride.

It was now drawing near to four A.M., and the moon, that had previously been so bright, had for some time past been obscured with clouds, so that it was no longer easy to distinguish objects at any

distance off. As in a couple of hours or so it would be broad daylight, it was necessary for me to make the most of the darkness that remained, which was of course favourable to our movements. At night I might easily be taken, especially with my escort, for a native horseman; whereas, as soon as it was light, I should have no chance for an instant of being taken for anything else but what I was. Accordingly, I and my escort left the *caravanserai*, and, riding forth, we again struck along the Grand Trunk Road in the direction I wished to explore. Sending one of my men ahead, with instructions to keep about 300 yards in front, and, in the event of his being stopped, to have a plausible story ready, and to endeavour to pass himself off as a rebel trooper, we proceeded at a brisk trot. We went on in this fashion for about four miles or so without seeing or hearing anything. As I knew from my map that we must shortly come upon a good-sized village, we now slackened our pace, and, on getting within 300 or 400 yards of it, I halted under a group of trees at the side of the road, where we were well concealed from observation, and ordered one of my men to enter the village and see what information he could pick up. Meanwhile I and the other trooper who was with me waited where we were. In about twenty minutes or so the man returned, bringing with him a respectable-looking Brahmin whom he had found in

the village, and whose house had on the previous evening been sacked by the rebels, and who was therefore naturally anxious to be revenged upon them to the utmost of his power. He informed me that the rebel force of which I was in search was encamped about a mile and a half to the right of the road, on the further side of a thick grove of trees, which concealed them from observation, and that they would stay there at least till noon of the coming day. Furthermore, he volunteered to act as my guide, and to point out to me their exact position, on condition that I would go there while it was yet dark; for if we stole up to them in the morning, we should be almost to a certainty discovered; and, though I might escape by flight, he would assuredly pay the forfeit with his life. As I was fully resolved not to return without precise information, if it could be got, I decided, hazardous as it seemed, to at once accept his offer. I hoped, while it was yet dark, to be able to get close to the enemy's camp, and, having taken up a position where I could see and not be seen, be able to take stock of their strength and numbers as soon as it was light; and when I had learnt all that I wanted to know, to steal away unperceived and carry back the information to my headquarters, which I had left during the night. At any rate, thought I, if the worst comes to the worst, and we are detected, we can ride for our lives. Looking back at my

resolve through the vista of years, it seems now, perhaps, that it was a foolhardy undertaking; but I was only twenty at the time, and at that age the spirit of adventure and daring is strong. Looking towards the east, I fancied that I could already detect a faint reddish tinge upon the edge of the horizon, which betokened the coming day. There was consequently no time to be lost. Making a slight detour in order to skirt the village, and as much as possible to avoid observation, we proceeded across the plain, which was here and there dotted with small clumps of tree. *En route* I carried on a whispered conversation with my guide, with the object of finding out as much as possible about the rebel force. He said that in his opinion it consisted of about 600 infantry, 200 cavalry, and 12 guns, with some artillerymen. He was positive as to the latter point, for he declared that he had counted the guns as they had passed. We had not gone far before I distinctly heard the busy hum both of men and animals that always goes up from a camp in India; and, looking in the direction whence the noise came, I could see the glare of the camp-fires reflected with a murky light against the sky. Cautiously we walked our horses along, the Brahmin on foot close beside me. All our senses were on the *qui vive*, and I was careful to mark and notice, as far as possible, the bearings of the country and the direction in which we were going.

—a precaution on which I had afterwards good reason to congratulate myself. Arrived within 300 yards or so of the camp, we halted under a thick clump of mango-trees to reconnoitre further. My guide said he must go now and hurry back, while there was yet time, to the village before it was daybreak.

"Yonder, sahib," said he, "is the camp, and you will have a good view of it as soon as it is light. A few yards to your right is a cart-track, which will lead you straight back to the village whence we have come. But," added he, "you are only three, and if they should see you and catch you, you may wash your hands of your life. May God preserve you."

The honest fellow would take no reward, though I pressed money upon him; and as I watched his retreating figure through the gloom, I tried to realise my position. Here was I, with only two of my men, within three or four hundred yards of nearly a thousand bloodthirsty rebels. I did not even know where their sentries were, and they might be within a stone's-throw of us for all that we could see. Indeed I was surprised that we had not been challenged long ago. At any rate, for the present, the only thing to be done was to remain where we were till the dawn of day, inasmuch as my present post was admirably suited to my purpose, which was to see and not be seen. It was a clump of

low, leafy trees, in the middle of a high *dhal* field, on slightly higher ground than the camp, and overlooking it. Seated on my horse, as the day gradually broke, I could easily from time to time distinguish from this point of observation groups of rebel soldiers clustered around the numerous campfires, whose lurid and fitful glare every now and then brought out in strong relief all surrounding objects. There were the long lines of picketed horses, and the camels sitting down in readiness to be laden, and making the night air resound with their hideous bellowings. There were, moreover, many little signs and tokens with which my campaigning had already familiarised me, and which plainly told me that the rebels contemplated a march as soon as it was day.

Once more did I cautiously examine the caps of my revolver, and also those of a heavy double-barrelled pistol which I carried with me; and having done this, I anxiously awaited the dawn of day, which for the last half-hour had been faintly flushing the eastern horizon. The minutes, however, seemed to drag on like hours, and, like Mazeppa—

> "Methought that mist of morning gray
> Would never dapple into day."

Day, however, came at last, and as gradually it grew lighter and lighter, the critical nature of our

position came home to me with startling clearness; a sort of dare-devil feeling, however, took possession of me, and made me resolve at all hazards to endeavour to find out that which I wanted to know. As soon as it was light enough to see anything, I drew out my field-glass from its case, and advanced to the edge of the clump of trees under whose shelter we were hid from view, and my eye swept the camp from right to left. At first, owing to the uncertain light, I could not perceive any guns, but at length I managed to see where they were. I could, however, only make out four, and I had strong reasons, from what I had heard, for believing that there were more: judging from the position of those which I could see, I thought that the rest must be hidden by a row of tents at the further end of the camp. This was provoking, for it was about the strength of the rebels in artillery that I had special instructions to gain accurate information. It was, however, high time to be off, as it was impossible that we could remain much longer where we were undetected. For the past quarter of an hour, moreover, my two troopers, though as brave and reckless fellows as any man could wish to have with him, had been growing uneasy, and repeatedly urged me if I had any respect for my own life or theirs to be off while we could. "All right," said I; "I will just go forward to the edge of the field to find out if I can see any guns behind

that row of tents, and then we will be off." Saying this, I advanced cautiously, bending my head low down on my horse's neck, and hidden by the tall herbage and a row of bushes, to the edge of the field where we were. I was right in my supposition. I could see now behind the row of tents, and there were the guns all parked in a row—twelve in number. This accorded exactly with the information that I had received, and was all that I wanted to know. The only thing that remained to be done was to get away unperceived as quickly as possible. I had just put my field-glass in my holster and was preparing to walk my horse cautiously back to the clump of trees, in order to make a start with my men from there. At this moment my horse, seeing and hearing many of his *confrères* in the camp, suddenly pricked his ears, and gave a long and loud neigh, as a friendly intimation of his presence. He was instantly answered by half-a-dozen equine throats in the rebel camp. Aroused by the noise, a black-bearded native, who had evidently been sleeping rolled up in his blankets under the shelter of the bushes close to me, started up about twenty yards off, and gazed at me for a moment in blank astonishment. Instinctively I drew my pistol from my waist-belt, in which I wore it, and levelled it at him. Recollecting, however, our critical position, I hesitated to fire, as I foresaw that the report, close as we were to the re-

bel camp, would inevitably betray us to the enemy. I tried, therefore, to terrify him into submission. Accordingly I called out to him in a low voice in Hindustani to come to me at once or I would shoot him. Instead of obeying, the man, evidently a rebel sepoy, took advantage of my momentary hesitation, and recovering from his first astonishment, turned round and fled like a hare in the direction of the camp, shouting with all his might and main as he did so. Our position was too critical to try and stop him, and I saw at once that it was high time to make good our escape while we could. My two men, whom I had left concealed under the clump of trees, had grasped the situation at once when they saw the man running, and rode up to me, exclaiming, "We must ride for our lives, sahib, for that man will bring the whole camp upon us." "Yes," said I, hastily, "we will ride for the village; and if hard pressed, we will separate, and make the best of our way to the main body of the picket." So saying, we put spurs to our horses, and rode rapidly for the village whence we had come. We had not gone more than eighty yards or so, when three rebel horsemen dashed out from a clump of trees upon our left front, and urging their horses to their utmost speed, rode down upon us with the evident intention of cutting off our retreat. Here is a pretty mess, thought I, as I drew my sword hastily from my scabbard. I was in front, my two

men were close behind. On came our foes at full speed, and as the foremost horseman neared me I thought at first of engaging him with my sword. Just as he came within three or four yards of me, the thought flashed across me that I could not afford to let him detain me, as time was everything to us, and that I might perhaps be able to make short work of him with my pistol. Quick as thought I dropped my sword, letting it hang by the knot from my wrist, and snatching out my pistol from my holster, I levelled it full at my assailant, a big black-bearded Mohammedan, and fired as I passed him at about two yards' distance. The ball hit him fair in the side, and for a second he reeled in his saddle, then dropping his uplifted sword-arm, he tumbled headlong forward to the ground, and his riderless horse galloped past just behind me. A thrill of exultation bounded through me as I saw him fall. Meanwhile one of my troopers had engaged another of our assailants. The rebel was a brave fellow enough, but he was no match for the sinewy Sikh behind me, who, after a few rapid exchanges of blows and parries, managed to get inside his guard, and gave him such a slash across the face with his sharp sabre, that he fell, blinded with blood, from his saddle. The third of our assailants, who had cautiously ridden some yards in rear, seeing his two companions *hors de combat*, took himself off to the camp, and we were

left free for a few moments to continue our way unmolested.

All this, though it takes some time to relate, happened in a few moments or so. I knew it would not be long ere we should be hotly pursued; for as we rattled our horses over the wide plain I could hear a tremendous uproar in the rebel camp, which was by this time thoroughly alarmed. Casting a hurried look behind me, I could see that my worst anticipations were realised. Already a dozen or two of the rebels had leaped upon their horses, and, sabre in hand, with wild shouts and gestures, were urging them on at their utmost speed as they strove to gain upon us. A ride for dear life, thought I, as I caught sight of them streaming after us. Faster and faster yet I led the way, over rough ground and smooth, looking well to the ground in front (as a fall or a stumble of one of our horses might have proved fatal to us), and my two men kept close beside me. Our horses, however, had been out for hours, while those of our pursuers were quite fresh, and we had not gone above a mile in this fashion when I began to fancy that our pursuers were gaining upon us. Before another half-mile had been passed, this idea of mine ripened into a certainty. Three or four of our pursuers, at any rate, were gaining rapidly upon us, and were two or three hundred yards in advance of the rest. If only they succeeded in stopping us, in order to

fight with them, I saw that the whole pack would be upon us, and we should all be cut to pieces to a certainty. They also could afford, owing to their numbers, not to spare their horses, while, if our horses were once pumped, nothing could save us. Nearer and nearer they gained upon us, and their shouts of exultation and hatred were borne to my ears as they triumphantly fancied themselves sure of their prey. "We must separate," said I, quickly. "Ride off to the right, and I will go straight on," as I thought that by thus separating we might perhaps divert our pursuers, and one or other of us would have a chance of getting off. They immediately turned off to the right, though still heading for the village. This *ruse* was fortunate enough for my men, but it did not avail much for me. Casting another glance behind me, I saw, to my dismay, that our enemies did not appear to trouble themselves at all about my companions, but all four of them continued to ride, without swerving, after me; for it was, as I might have anticipated, the English officer whom they had marked for their prey, and whom they were thirsting to kill. Closer and closer they creep up to me; but I now urge my horse on, and manage to forge a little ahead. At this rate, thought I, they will soon pump their horses, if I can only hold on. But they are riding at a headlong pace, and I am forced to let out my horse also to his utmost speed in order to keep

ahead of them. Already the foremost of the four is less than a hundred yards behind me, the other three close behind him, while there are a dozen more a short distance behind them. Even now, though twenty long years have passed since that day, it makes my blood jump to think of it. For a moment my heart dies within me, as I feel that the game is up; and I set my teeth and determine to die hard—to sell my life as dearly as I can, and fight it out to the last.

In the excitement of the ride I naturally had not looked far before me; but now I suddenly saw, just thirty or forty yards ahead of me, the dike full of water, which we had passed over in the early morning on our way to reconnoitre the camp. A thrill of hope and joy passed through me. It was a very fair jump, but nothing out of the way for a good horse; and I knew that mine, who was a good fencer, would clear it, and that there was a very good chance that the horses of my pursuers would not, as natives seldom practise their horses at jumping. They seemed hardly more than fifty or sixty yards off; and had it not been for the hope of placing the dike between myself and them, I felt that in another few moments, if they got much nearer, I should have been forced to turn at bay and fight it out to the last. Four to one, however, was hopeless odds, and with a ray of hope I rode straight at the dike. Even then, as I neared it, the thought

flashed with a terrible misgiving through my brain that my horse might perhaps refuse it, and that in that case my pursuers would be upon me in a moment. Deadly as is the peril in which I am, I have yet the coolness and presence of mind to steady my horse somewhat as he comes up to the leap, and for a moment to slacken his speed. My gallant horse, a big powerful Australian gelding, sets his ears as he sees the leap in front of him; and when, at the critical moment, I dig my spurs into him with all the energy of desperation, he answers to the call, takes off well, and lands clearly, despite a somewhat rotten bank on the other side. (Assuredly at that moment I felt but little tempted to agree with the Psalmist that a horse was a vain thing for a man to trust to.) My horse had scarcely regained his stride when the four foremost of my foes, who had pressed me so hard, were on the brink of the dike.

Scarcely daring to hope that I may escape, I look anxiously round to see if they too get over. Two out of the four are slightly in advance, and they ride straight at the dike. To my intense delight their horses both refuse, and will have nothing to say to the jump; while the other two do not attempt it, but ride along the bank in order to find an easier place to cross. As I widen every second the distance between me and my pursuers, and my spirits thrill with exultation at my renewed prospect of

escape, I am unable to restrain a shout of defiance at my baffled foes, which is immediately answered by an angry carbine-shot from one of them, that, of course, does me no harm.

God grant that I may have a few moments more, and I shall be comparatively safe. Again I head straight for the village, which in the headlong race I had ridden a little wide of, and which was now but a short half-mile distant. Once I am safe through the village, I ought to fall in with some of my picket, to whom I had given orders that as soon as it was daybreak they should patrol the road in that direction. Once more do I look back. Full twenty of my foes are now on the further brink, but, as far as I can make out, not one of them is over as yet. Another two hundred yards are passed when I see that half-a-dozen of them have at length got over, and are following me up as before with frantic haste, and doing their best to make up the ground they have lost. On they come, but I have got such a start that they do not gain on me much before I reach the village, and am lost for the time to their view.

As I rattle down the main street of the village, which was surrounded by a high wall, a few of the villagers, just roused from their slumbers, come out to the doors of their houses and gaze curiously at me as I pass. As I near the old arched gate at the further end, I hear a shout

behind me, and on looking round, I see my two men, from whom I had parted a few minutes previously, coming up a by-street. They had taken advantage of our pursuers having gone off in pursuit of me alone, to make good their flight to the village, and thinking themselves comparatively secure, were taking a pull at their horses. They were overjoyed to see me, as they had given me up for lost. There was, however, as I told them, no time to talk. Our horses were all of them pretty well pumped, and I knew well enough that our pursuers were hard upon our track, and that the villagers would be sure to point out to them the route we had taken.

As we pass under the arched gateway, I see that there are an old pair of folding gates, evidently but seldom used, belonging to it. A happy thought strikes me, that if we could manage to shut the gates, and fasten them somehow or other, we might yet delay our pursuers a few minutes, and gain a little breathing-time for our horses. No sooner thought of than we attempt to put it into execution. I ordered one of my troopers to dismount, and while I held his panting horse, he attempted to swing the old gates (which were made of massive bars of wood with intervals of two or three inches apart) upon their hinges. One of them yielded readily enough to his efforts, but the other resisted all his strength. It was

evident that the gates had not been shut for a long time. In vain did he pull and push, it would not budge an inch. There were none of the villagers standing by to help, and seeing that he could not manage it alone, I bade the other man dismount in order to help him. At last by their joint efforts they succeeded in moving the stubborn gate, and little by little were getting it to close. Every moment did I expect to hear the horses of our pursuers rattle down the street. Nor had we long to wait ere they were upon us. Just as the gates were closed, and before we had time to think about getting them fastened, seven or eight rebels appeared in view coming down the street. They were evidently thrown off the scent, and drew up to question the villagers as to our whereabouts. While doing so, one of them caught sight of me through the gate as I held one of my men's horses in the road. An instant shout told me I was seen, as with one impulse they put their horses to a gallop and rode towards us. They were only about 500 yards from us. "Quick! quick!" said I; "your carbines, are they loaded?" "Here is mine," said one, as he picked it up from the ground where he had laid it, in case he wanted it. "Wait till they get quite close," said I, "and then shoot the foremost horse. You can make sure of him. We will stick by you to the last." The other trooper meanwhile had remounted his

horse, so that we only awaited the effect of the shot to be off. In another moment they were almost upon us. "Steady," said I, as the man stood with carbine levelled and resting between the bars of the gates; "aim low." As I spoke his shot re-echoed through the gateway, filling it for a moment with smoke. Its success exceeded my most sanguine expectations. I could just see that the foremost horse, badly wounded, had fallen headlong forward with his rider to the ground. Wedged in, as they were, in the narrow roadway, and going at a headlong pace, the two horses immediately behind fell over him, and as far as I recollect, there seemed to me two or three men and horses struggling on the ground at once. But the rest of them, four or five in number, recovering from their confusion, were already at the gates, and, leaning forward, were tugging at them in order to open them, so as to get through. We could not be off for a moment, as we had to wait while the man who had fired had remounted his horse, which was excited and would not stand still. As he was scrambling into his saddle, I saw that our foes had succeeded in wrenching open the gate just sufficiently to get through one at a time. The foremost of them was already half through, and the rest would have speedily followed, as with shouts and execrations, in their impatience to get at us, they were urging him

on from behind. Seeing the necessity of giving them another check, I pulled back my horse just as we were starting, and riding up to within three yards or so of the gate, pistol in hand, I aimed it full at the foremost rebel and fired. I can recollect seeing his horse rear wildly up, but I waited not to see the effect of my shot, for we all three sped away at our best pace along the side of the road. Looking back after a time, I saw we were pursued no more. Whether it was that they found we were not to be molested with impunity, and were discouraged by the losses which they had suffered; or whether they despaired of catching us; or in consequence of their having started after us in such a hurry they had not brought any more ammunition with them, and therefore gave up the contest as unequal, I cannot say. We had not gone a couple of miles further before we fell in with a patrol of my picket, which, I was informed, was still at the *caravanserai* awaiting my return. Being anxious to give our horses as much breathing-time as possible after their severe exertions, I proceeded at a walk in the direction of the picket, taking care to keep a sharp look-out in rear, in case we were again pursued. Arrived at the *caravanserai*, I found the remainder of my men duly on the alert and ready to receive me. After a short halt, we began to retrace our steps towards our camp, which we had left

the night before. After we had gone about three miles or so we fell in with the advanced-guard of our own force, which had already struck its camp and marched onwards that morning. Upon reaching the main body of the force I made my report to the general in command (who, with his staff, was riding at the head of the column), and had the satisfaction of receiving a good deal of praise for the information which I had brought, and warm congratulations upon my narrow escape.[1]

There is no need further to continue the tale. Suffice it to say that the rebels, whose camp I had discovered, were at once followed up; and though they had taken timely warning, and had already decamped, yet they were pursued for some miles; their guns were all captured, and their whole force scattered to the winds. When our force passed through the village referred to in the foregoing narrative, we found the horse which my trooper had shot in the gateway, and the man whom I had fired at, both lying dead upon the spot where they had fallen.

Reader, my tale of "a ride for life" is told. Certainly I and the two who were with me may be fairly said to have taken our lives in our hands, and only to have escaped by the skin of our teeth.

[1] It may here be stated that M——, the officer in search of whom I had been sent out, rejoined the column in safety some hours later on the same day.

# A SKETCH FROM BABYLON.

[*MAGA.* JAN. AND FEB. 1863.]

## CHAPTER I.

8.12 P.M., a fine April evening. A hansom cab rattled up to the door of a "noble mansion" in Grosvenor Square.

The impetuous horse had scarce been jerked into a halt when a young gentleman emerged on the pavement, together with a gibus and white cravat. Slipping a shilling into the driver's hand, he gave a loud and hurried knock at the closed portal. The sound had not vanished when, the door opening widely, Mr Augustus Bromley marched through rows of servants into the inner hall.

"Am I very late?" he inquired confidentially of the elderly valet who received his cloak, evidently no new acquaintance.

"Not very, sir, but dinner is served, and my master is coming down-stairs."

Sure enough, as he spoke, the portly stomach of

Sir Jehoshaphat was seen descending, his white waistcoat heading the goodly procession.

Slowly and mournfully did the procession proceed, as is the custom in this melancholy island. Sir Jehoshaphat smiled on the youth in the hall with grim hospitality, but without a word. The worthy man was not wont to utter before his soup.

Meanwhile Mr Bromley stood near the baluster, "hat in his hand, and famine in his face."

Slowly and sadly did the guests troop in, while our Augustus stood watching the couples with a longing, inquiring look.

It was a great banquet this dinner of Sir Jehoshaphat. A new dining-room had been added to the "noble mansion" in Grosvenor Square, to celebrate the addition of another million or so to his fortune. A dinner was to be given in honour of the room, and my lady had culled the choicest names from her visiting-book.

Sir Jehoshaphat had insisted only on one guest. It was Mr Augustus Bromley.

## CHAPTER II.

No wonder, then, that Lady Coxe was rather reserved in her method of addressing the tardy arrival.

"'*Ow* de do?" she bowed terribly as she passed him, bringing up the rear of her splendid company.

Mr Bromley bowed low, as with a look of mingled relief and disappointment he offered his arm to Letitia, Miss Coxe, who fluttered like an angel of thirty in the wake of her ample mamma.

As the company was being distributed round the table, the young man once more cast his eye over the party, lest peradventure he should have missed, in the hurry, the features he was seeking.

But no; there he saw the dukes and privy councillors gathered together by Lady Coxe; elder sons and younger sons, dullards and wits; but nowhere could he find that one guest on whose presence he had counted. So, turning to Letitia, he joyfully addressed her.

"Well, Miss Coxe, have you been going out lately a good deal?"

"Not very much," answered Letitia curtly, as she elected for clear soup. Miss Coxe was of an age to appreciate the merits of that amphibious edible.

"Not very much, Miss Coxe?" rejoined Mr Bromley, as he modestly chose the portion of turtle, the pendant of his neighbour's pottage.

"No, Mr Bromley, not very much."

"How's that?"

"Why, really——"

"I'm sure not from want of invitations?"

"Oh dear, no!" answered Miss Coxe, although such was pretty much the fact.

"From want of inclination, perhaps?"

Letitia smiled. Turbot was before her, and for the moment she could not speak. At length she paused.

"You know I never go to balls," she said. "I think the eldest of four sisters should have done with such frivolities, and for the last ten days there has been nothing else."

"Very kind of you, I'm sure, Miss Coxe, to give them up to your sisters. But you are so kind."

Miss Coxe smiled again, and betook herself for consolation to a patty.

Thus far the wily Bromley accompanied her; and now, having seen her lips glued for some seconds to a pink and open glass, containing an effervescing fluid, he proceeded to cross-examine his neighbour with no slight skill and subtilty.

"What do you think made me late to-day?"

"I am sure I don't know."

"I don't think you can keep a secret, Miss Coxe."

A cutlet stifled the remonstrance.

"Indeed I can," murmured at length the virgin.

"Then I may tell it you later. But first you must tell me some secrets."

"I'm sure you're laughing at me, Mr Bromley."

"Contrariwise blessing——"

"For shame, Mr Bromley."

"I beg your pardon—very wrong, I know; the bad effects of a careful education. But first, is

Lady Coxe very angry with me for being so late?"

"Not very."

"Oh, Miss Coxe, how roguish is that smile!"

Letitia was tackling the mutton.

"And now, do tell me how are your sisters."

"Which of them?" Miss Coxe did not inquire without a reason.

"All! why are they not here to-night?"

"Missy is not out yet."

"But the others—Miss Florence and Miss Constance?"

"I will let you into a little family history. They are both going to-night to the ball at Conisbro' House. They were afraid of spoiling their dresses if they came down to dinner, as afterwards there would not be time to dress; so they will not make their appearance till later."

Mr Bromley was not ill-pleased at the information. He himself was going to the ball. With due reticence, however, he supressed all appearance of emotion.

"And are you not going to the ball? It will be nothing without you."

"Do you really think so?" murmured Letitia, with an anxious softness in her tones.

Bromley felt himself as on the verge of a precipice. Turning to his left, he opened fire on his other neighbour.

The neighbour was a stout gentleman, hitherto intent on the occupation of the hour. He was a celebrated physician, of great wealth, addicted to feel the pulse of the Stock Exchange as well as of patients, an old bachelor, director of assurance companies, a man of few words but of many meals.

Bromley knew the gourmand slightly, and with much plasticity addressed him.

"Very good mayonnaise."

"HEAR, HEAR!" answered the Doctor.

"Truly admirable," continued Bromley.

"HEAR, HEAR!——"

"We had a house dinner yesterday."

"Hear, hear! What did you have?"

"We began with a dozen of oysters each, which Lucullus might have envied."

"Too many; eight is quite enough before dinner. I hope you put a little touch of cayenne in the pepper-castor."

"Of course we did." Bromley looked at his neighbour as though injured by the doubt.

"Hear, hear!" rejoined the latter, apologetically ——"and what next?"

"A 'bisque' soup—admirable."

"Hear, hear! Does your *chef* understand that little invention of Careme's as to curing the tails? It is a wonderful art. Take of carrots sliced one ounce, of sugar one ounce, ordinary pepper one table-spoonful——"

"He told me that he had made a special study of that point," interrupted Bromley.

"Hear, hear!" the Doctor spoke but faintly. Bisque was a topic of constant heart-burning between himself and his cook.

At this moment Letitia, indignant at the desertion, interrupted her neighbour.

"Papa is speaking to Dr Leadbitter," she remarked; and sure enough Sir Jehoshaphat was chanting to his customer from the centre of the table, where, by Lady Coxe's orders, he had taken up a position opposite herself.

"Do you recollect that piece of plate, Leadbitter?"

The middle of the table exhibited a perfect oasis of palm-trees and camels, with springs of water and turbaned figures.

"Hear, hear," answered the Doctor.

"What is it?" asked a duke, good-naturedly.

"That superb epergne," continued Sir Jehoshaphat, "was presented to me for my exertions on behalf of the new Bombay Steam Company."

"Hear, hear," from Dr Leadbitter.

"And what is this?" asked a wit, mildly, and nodding towards another piece of plate exhibiting a vessel gradually sinking into the waves.

"That was given me by my brother Directors after twenty years' constant attendance at the Rara Avis Marine Insurance Office."

"Ah, Sir Jehoshaphat, that's what you call making insurance doubly sure."

"Blagden's in luck to-night," whispered a fellow-wit to his neighbour; "and that's not always the case. I saw him reading the inscription round that silver sea. He's short-sighted, and couldn't conceal his exertions. Then he led the way to the plate, and brought out his little sentiment."

The second wit's neighbour—a young lady just out—felt awed at her companion's severity. In fact, Lady Coxe had made the usual mistake of inviting more than one wit. She had asked three, not including Dr Leadbitter who, by his own family, was considered to trench on that order. Dr Leadbitter was, nevertheless, very good-natured. So, *apropos* of the insurance office, he thought to tell a story redounding to the credit of his host.

"Do you recollect, Sir Jehoshaphat, what our worthy chairman said on that occasion? 'Well,' says he, 'now that you've got the ship, I hope you'll always keep your head above water.'"

"That's worthy of Blagden," whispered Whiting, the rival wit, to his frightened associate, while Dr Leadbitter repeated the point—

"I hope you'll always keep your head above water."

A sickly smile passed round the table.

"Talking of Rara Avis," began Blagden, "I've

heard a new interpretation of that well-known passage."

"Heaven help us!" gasped Whiting, "when he once begins on those philological discussions."

The fact is, that Blagden and Whiting are two deadly enemies.

Whiting is a man of some power in repartee, and of considerable information. He is very amusing and anecdotic. Some people go so far as to say that he prepares himself for dinners by a preliminary course of reading. Be this as it may, he is very pleasant at a dinner-table, and makes the time pass pleasantly.

Blagden, on the other hand, is a man of very small powers, and entirely destitute of any humour soever. True, he reads much, and amasses information; but his manner of retailing his goods is dreary in the extreme, and the effort is so evident to sustain a part into which he has been forced by a curious dispensation, that his jokes, except to the dullest, sound like a knell.

The third wit was completely in the background. He was one of those men who shine only in a choice society.

So Whiting and Blagden had it to themselves. The dukes and privy councillors, the dowagers and damsels, were content to listen, and the two wags reigned supreme in the new dining-room.

Blagden had for the moment possession of the

tribune. Rara Avis was being discussed with much acumen.

He had come to the words "nigroque," when Lady Coxe, with the temerity of ignorance, came to the rescue of her guests. The conversation rolled towards Whiting. He was to be the arbitrator of an appeal.

"Ho! I'm sure 'e can tell us," exclaimed Lady Coxe; "'e knows everything."

So the question was put to Mr Whiting; and Bromley leant forward, not without some curiosity, to hear the wit's answer.

"Ho, Mr Whitin', can you tell us, do now, 'oo is that delightful foreigner we met a month ago at Lady Moorpath's. Lady Moorpath says 'e's so delightful."

"As I had not the honour of being at the ball, I must first, as a lawyer, ask the name of the party." Lady Coxe was puzzled. She was conscious of a certain deficiency in French, and was reluctant to expose her vulnerabilities to the dinner-table.

A supernumerary kindly relieved her.

"We were talking of Count Rabelais de Chinon."

"Oh, now I have it. Well, I do know something of the gentleman—a very pleasant agreeable man."

"Yes, I wanted to ask him to-day, only some'ow or other I couldn't," retorted Lady Coxe, with a glance at Bromley, that partly revealed to him the cause of that lady's displeasure.

"But do you know anything of him?" inquired Sir Jehoshaphat, in a tone intended to be easy and careless. "Is he of a great family?"

"Why, yes," answered Whiting. "He claims a lineal descent from the author of 'Gargantua.'"

"Now, that is a pretty mistake," interrupted Blagden, glad to have caught his rival tripping. "Rabelais was a priest, curate of Meudon."

Whiting cast a glance of compassionate scorn on the unfortunate wit.

"I was not aware that his priesthood need make any difference."

The answer created some sensation. Some of the elders smiled. Others looked grave. The young men grinned. The young ladies were unconscious — all except Letitia. Letitia blushed. But then she was thirty. As to Blagden, poor man, he was covered with confusion and distress at not being able to floor his antagonist.

"The clerical rule was very lax in those days, as you, as a student, ought to know, Mr Blagden," continued Mr Whiting, with severity. "The Rabelais of the present day declare their ancestor to have been married, as were his friends the Cardinal Castillon and Bishop Montluc. You must recollect, Sir Jehoshaphat, the celebrated epigram of the day on the subject."

"Oh, very well, very well, Mr Whiting," answered

the baronet, with a cool assurance worthy of a better cause.

And Whiting felt rejoiced at the little fraud. He had escaped the task of repeating the epigram, of which he had forgotten the two best lines.

But he was not to get off so easily.

"Can't you repeat it, Mr Whiting?" asked one of the dukes.

"I am afraid that this is not exactly an audience suited for it," rejoined Whiting, with an expressive look. "I am sure Sir Jehoshaphat would not wish me to do so."

Sir Jehoshaphat smiled, throwing into his countenance an expression of much villany and inward satisfaction.

"But is the race then uninterrupted to its source?" interposed a peer, with some pretensions to heraldic knowledge. "I do not recollect the name in French history."

"Nor does any one else, my lord. The fact being that a financier, one of the few who retained a fortune of Law's making, furbished up a pedigree, and, by some inexplicable process, obtained nobility from Louis XV. The present representative of the family died, I believe, some years ago, a quiet and harmless old man. As to the family fortune I can say nothing, as I know nothing. The present young man is supposed to be reforming, having passed, as I am told, a 'jeunesse orageuse.'"

As he came to a pause, Lady Coxe bowed, and the ladies left the room.

## CHAPTER III.

It will scarcely be necessary to reproduce the after-dinner conversation. The wits gave palpable signs of their existence. The politicians talked politics, the younger men talked of their amusements, while Bromley, sitting between Whiting and Sir Jehoshaphat, listened to the sallies of the one, and enjoyed a little confidential dialogue with the other.

"Ah, well," muttered Whiting, as the gentlemen were about to follow the ladies, and in answer to a casual observation, "the world may turn and turn and twist for ever, it will never turn up anything new. Here we have had fardingales and hoops recurring at certain periods, like an epidemic. Here they are again, and here they are likely to continue. Now France takes fashions from us—now we take them from France. Grimm wrote a very pretty paper on the subject, but, long before his time, we were mutually guilty of the folly."

"Talking of Grimm," interrupted Blagden, anxious also to exhibit his lore, "do you recollect that story he tells of a dealer in millinery, who, having lost a large sum by the bankruptcy of the Prince

de Guéméné, complained that henceforth he must live like a private gentleman."

"Ah, my dear Blagden, did you never hear the maxims of the 'Reveur'? They ought to be posted up all over London."

"I think I have," replied Blagden.

"I have not," declared the host, as the party was approaching the door of the drawing-room. "I wish you would repeat them to my daughters. I am sure 'twould do them good." And beckoning Miss Florence and Miss Constance to listen, Sir Jehoshaphat begged Mr Whiting to administer his advice.

"Are you prepared for a strong dose?" inquired the physician.

"Oh, quite," answered Florence; "a neutral beauty," to use a French writer's expression. She was short, round, sunburnt, black-eyed, and saucy.

And with her assurance Whiting began.

"First, Everything which alters or disguises nature, proceeds from a false taste."

"Hear, hear," chimed in Dr Leadbitter, who in the meanwhile had drawn near the little group with Mr Bromley—as near as was compatible with the ladies' dresses.

"Second, Everything which forces nature beyond its due bounds, proceeds from a bad taste."

Sir Jehoshaphat looked triumphantly at his daughter.

"Thirdly, Everything which eclipses the 'beauties, or hinders the freedom of action, proceeds from a want of taste.'"

"Very true," remarked Sir Jehoshaphat sententiously.

"Hear, hear," chorussed Mr Leadbitter.

"'Fourthly, Everything which constrains nature, or hinders the freedom of action, proceeds from a' —I must say it, ladies—'depraved taste.'

"'Fifthly, Everything which loads nature with superfluous ornament, proceeds from an affectation of taste.'

"And, lastly, 'Everything which is out of character is certainly out of taste.'"

"And now you have got it, girls," nodded Sir Jehoshaphat, contentedly. And as he turned towards Constance, his eyes lit up with pleasure. He could not conceal his paternal pride.

Constance was tall, and beautiful. Her fair complexion, her fine classic features, bore a stamp of refinement far above the status of her family.

Dignity and womanliness were well combined in the dark hazel eye, the finely chiselled nostril, the short upper lip, and the delicately rounded chin. Her movements were graceful. As her father looked, her small hand was arranging a flower in her hair, and the pose was eminently consolatory.

"At any rate, I will say this of my girls," exclaimed the father; "although they may bedizen

themselves out as they like, they never exceed their allowance."

"Hear, hear," responded Leadbitter.

"An admirable quality," added a duke. As these praises were being lavished, a slight cloud came over the brilliant features of Constance. None perceived it but Bromley.

"And may I ask how much is considered necessary for a young lady's pin-money?" inquired Leadbitter.

"I give them each two hundred and fifty pounds a-year, paid punctually and quarterly," answered Sir Jehoshaphat, pompously. "On the first of January, the first of April, the first of July, and the first of October, each of my grown-up daughters receives the sum of sixty-two pounds ten shillings, income-tax not deducted."

"Hear, hear," burst out Mr Leadbitter.

"That's the exact figure, my Lord Duke, two—five—ought," answered Sir Jehoshaphat, rattling in his pockets.

"Mais c'est princier," interrupted a strange voice, and the millionaire's countenance fell.

The little group turned, and before them stood the well-trimmed whiskers and handsome features of Count Rabelais de Chinon.

Lady Coxe advanced playfully.

"Oh, méchong, 'ow de do? Where 'ave you been dining? You mush dine 'ere on Tuesday."

Lady Coxe turned reproachfully towards her husband and Bromley with a severe expression, as though but for them the Count would have been dining that day in Grosvenor Square.

They were talking to the girls, and were apparently unconscious of the mute appeal. A rapid glance between the girls and Augustus, however, showed that this was not the case. Meanwhile the guests had, one by one, departed, and there remained none but the family party, Mr Bromley, and the Count. The latter approached Constance.

"What beautiful toilette," he began, with much truth; and, leaving him to finish his conversation with the daughter, Bromley led Lady Coxe to a neighbouring settee, and opened fire on that lady's heart.

"Lady Coxe, I was late to-day for dinner."

"Well, never mind, Mr Bromley. It is not, perhaps, very civil to come late to a banquet like that of to-day. But perhaps you were engaged."

"I was engaged on your account."

"Indeed, and pray 'ow may that have been?" inquired the old lady, with much sarcasm.

"Why, I have heard you more than once express a desire to become acquainted with Lady Ilminster."

Lady Coxe began to feel interested in the conversation. Her dignity, however, did not allow her to show it. She answered slowly.

"Lady Ilminster is a person 'ose beauty and personal merits make 'er acquaintance undoubtedly desirable."

"You are not, perhaps, aware that she is nearly related to me."

"I am acquainted with that coincidence."

"And, perhaps, you know that she has been for some time very ill at her Richmond villa."

"Such rumour 'ad reached my ear."

"She is now better, and to-day I went to see her."

Lady Coxe was really becoming engrossed in her young friend's communications.

He continued—

"You hear everything, Lady Coxe; have you heard that she is going to give, in celebration of her convalescence, a very little *déjeuner* at the villa?"

"I 'ad 'eard something of the kind. But it's to be very shwosy. Only one 'undered and twenty to be asked, so that they may all sit down and dine at the same time."

"Well, Lady Coxe, I thought you might like to go."

"Oh, indeed, Mr Bromley; but do you think by the rules of etiquette that Lady Ilminster could send me a card without being presented to me? You know, though not members of the aristocracy, we are of a good fam'ly, and 'old our 'eads 'igh."

"Indeed you do. But Lady Ilminster desires me to say that she hopes you will excuse her, as she has not been able, from her illness, to make your acquaintance, but that she takes the liberty of sending you this card, as her party would not be complete without you."

"We shall be very 'appy," answered Lady Coxe, with much self-possession, while secretly she could have hugged the young man to her heart. And, indeed, that organ beat with terrible velocity as she perused the magic cardboard. Lady Coxe, Miss Florence Coxe, Miss Constance Coxe. Bromley had taken care that the names should be specified, as he distrusted Letitia and her possible conduct on this occasion.

Lady Coxe was bent on giving her young friend an instantaneous proof of her gratitude.

"Can we give you a seat to Conisbro' 'Ouse?" she asked.

"Mamma!" said Florence, in a tone of admonition.

A cloud came over the face of Constance.

Bromley was full of tact.

"I am afraid your carriage is already over-full. Three are quite enough under existing circumstances."

"Voila, miladi, l'inconvénient des modes d'aujourd'hui," interposed the Frenchman, with intention.

"Ho, Congte, I'm much afraid you're a *movvy soujy*."

The Frenchman placed his hand on his heart.

"Then I will walk with this gentleman to the ball," continued the Count.

"Do you know the Duchess, Congte?" asked the Baronet's Lady.

"No, miladi, but you will present me."

Poor Lady Coxe sank back aghast, and had it not been for Mr Augustus Bromley her whole evening would have been rendered wretched.

He interposed at this juncture.

"If the Count will honour me by placing himself under my chaperonage, I think I can insure him a hearty welcome. The Duchess has given me *carte blanche* for dancing men, and I suppose Count Rabelais comes under that category."

The Count seemed prepared to give an immediate evidence of his powers, when, the carriage being announced, Lady Coxe led the way to the door.

## CHAPTER IV.

"My friend," began the Count, as he took Bromley's arm—"My friend, shall 'e jump into a 'ansom-cab?"

"It's quite close, and the hour is not late: shall we walk?"

"All is equal. We can converse more at our ease walking, and I have much to say to you."

"You honour me, Count."

Bromley was somewhat surprised at the sudden confidence. He had never spoken to the Count but three times before that evening.

"I entertain an instinctive sympathy for you, my friend, not a little enhanced by the feeling that it is reciprocated."

"You flatter me, Count."

"From the moment I first saw your Anglo-Saxon face, I felt that we were destined to be friends for life, perhaps comrades."

"Really you overwhelm me."

"Nay, perhaps some day to be still more nearly connected."

"Indeed, Count, these anticipations of yours even outstrip my wishes."

"Believe me, I shall not dislike it. Foi de Rabelais."

"How can I express——"

"I have seen—yes, my little Bromley, I have seen it."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, I have seen it—*polisson*—ah—*animal!*"

"I really do not understand."

"Ah, malin! do not you think I see the entente cordiale between Monsieur Bromley and la petite espiègle, the young Florence?"

"Really, Count Rabelais, you altogether mistake."

"Chut! I will not breathe the word; but I have seen what I have seen. Let me tap you on the stomach, *gueux!*" and the Count executed one or two steps lightly on the pavement, singing a refrain.

"Au dieu d'amour il n'est rien d'impossible,
Donc il ne faut jamais désespérer,
Car toute femme a sa corde sensible,
Que tôt ou tard un amant sait toucher."

Bromley followed in silence, waiting for further disclosures.

"She is piquante, the fair Florence," continued the Count, as soon as this outpouring had subsided —"She is piquante, and some say she is rich, la petite—eh, *misérable?*"

"Why, indeed, I have never inquired. Not having the intentions you attribute to me, it has not been worth my while entering into the question."

"But she must be rich, la petite?"

"For her sake, I hope so."

"But they tell me that he is a millionaire, the bon papa."

"I fancy he must be very well off."

"But are there not half a hundred suitors for the daughters?"

"Why, you see the fair Letitia is not married,

and if suitors were so plentiful, she would not be averse, I imagine, to the holy state."

"But I fancy that Whiting has little intentions towards that respectable young lady."

"Nonsense!"

"Then why ask him to the house?"

"He is a writer. In this country any man with the gift of putting two words together may be a thorn in your side for ever."

"But they tell me that old Jehoshaphat has no children but the four daughters."

"Not to my knowledge."

"Then you think him an old *vaurien?* Poor miladi Coxe!"

"No, I should think him the truest of husbands."

"Then he has only four daughters?"

"Ostensibly."

"And they the inheritors of his fortunes?"

"I should suppose so."

"Then, my little Bromley, we shall be brothers-in-law."

"You honour me: but how do you propose to effect this desirable result?"

"You shall marry your little love la Florence. I will espouse Constance, who, after all, will make the best Countess of the two. We will mutually aid each other—la mère Coxe will be on my side, le père on yours. Does that suit you?"

"With many thanks for the offer, not at all. I

have no intentions with regard to Miss Florence; and here we are at the ball——"

"We must talk of this again," whispered the Count as he bent a low bow to the Duchess, and left his companion to make the necessary explanations.

## CHAPTER V.

Publius Syrus tells us that to deliberate on useful things is a prudent delay.

It may not be useless to deliberate for a short space on the causes that prevented Lady Coxe from giving a seat in her carriage to Mr Augustus Bromley.

Dress has always been one of the weaknesses inherent in the British female.

Queen Elizabeth left three thousand dresses—Frenche gownes, rounde gownes, loose gownes, pantobles, saufegardes, and juppes.

The widespread farthingale was likewise in her day the cause of much extravagance. Large dresses are inevitably more expensive than those of more rational proportions, not only in the increase of size, but in the additional ornament necessary to relieve the wide expanse of colour. Queen Elizabeth likewise excelled in this department of extravagance. Embroidered with lions, tigers, nay, serpents, sea-horses, swans, and ostriches, her dress

in quality was as luxurious as in quantity. Cloths of gold and of silver, rich Genoa velvets, silks, satins, and costly tissues, all contributed to demolish the fortunes of husbands under the virgin Queen. Rich laces completed the robes, when the substrata were not considered sufficiently ruinous for display.

The 'Weekly Journal' for January 1717 is said to record the death of the celebrated mantua-maker, Mrs Selby, the inventor, or probably the reviver, of the hoop-petticoat. Mrs Selby was the first of "women's coopers."

Mrs Selby was, therefore, the prime cause of Bromley's exile from the family-coach of the Coxes, and the readers should know the object of the invention. It was to conceal the pregnancy of a king's mistress—the shame of a faithless wife. A volume would scarcely contain all that has been said and written on the subject. One extract will suffice.

"It was Madame de Montespan who invented the *robes battantes* to conceal her pregnancy; but when she wore them, it was precisely as if she had publicly announced what she affected to conceal, as people said—'Madame de Montespan has put on her *robe battante*, therefore,'" &c.

Yet this is the dress adopted by the Miss Coxes.

Oh for the pen of Mrs Stone to describe their

costume at that luxurious ball! Or rather the costume of Constance; for Florence, with her "neutral face"—that is, neither ugly nor handsome, but with a little lively countenance—endeavoured to follow the precepts of the English philosophers, and to "imitate in her dress that conciseness, that spirit, and that point which ought to characterise the epigram."

But Constance, the tall, majestic Constance, demanded more dignified accessories.

In her costume she affected a magnificence and a gorgeous humility which seemed the intermediate link between the virgin and the matron, for, indeed, it partook of each.

A skirt of sumptuous pink silk descended circling to the ground, "armed with ribs of whale."

Flounces of rich lace covered the petticoat, scarcely allowing the first fabric to appear.

Here and there a bouquet of moss-roses, artistically wrought, looped up some portion of the dress, and a glitter occasionally betrayed a gem only half-concealed, which shone like a dewdrop.

Her boddice was covered with the same flowers. Art had outwitted nature in the frosted leaves, sunburnt, or a tender green; nay, the scent of the rose had been added by the faithful artist.

Her head-dress consisted of a net of pearls encircled by the rich diadem of her hair; while a fresh nosegay of moss-roses and lilies of the valley

completed the illusion, to which neither taste nor expense had spared their help.

Still there was a cloud on that fair face, which told of hidden vexation or anxiety.

The classical features were not at rest, the movements of the graceful form were nervous.

A calm looker-on would have guessed the internal agitation of her who was universally proclaimed the beauty of that evening.

The walls had disappeared beneath a trelliswork, to which creepers and rare plants of every kind and country had been attached. Portable fountains, disposed in divers parts of the lofty rooms, cooled the atmosphere by their sparkling appearance and silvery sound. The chandeliers and lustres were also rich with flowers.

The orchestra was composed of eminent artists. Wealth and luxury had poured their treasures on the head of a thousand guests. Those guests were taking their pleasure in a thousand ways, suited to their different tastes—some with dancing till faint, others with slanders and backbiting; the more inoffensive, with listlessly looking on. Others more benignant (and these formed the weakest number), lavished admiration.

Matches were supposed, made up, and again undone in the short space of an hour, and speculation under every shape went her nightly round.

None more speculating than My Lady Coxe

herself, as we may judge from the following conversation.

"It is, after all, a great thing and a grand privilege to 'ave the 'onor of a title."

"I should not care that my daughters should have titles," was the tart answer of a small red-faced lady, to whom the observation had been addressed, and whose red-faced daughters could never dream of aspiring above squires.

"But now," resumed Lady Coxe, with a patronising air, "isn't it pleasant to 'ear announced the Count and Countess of So-and-So, or the Marchioness, instead of plain Mrs Somebody."

This was another hit at the little woman, who bridled up and answered—

"Solid wealth and comfort for me and mine—none of those foreign Counts that don't count much in this country."

Lady Coxe blushed through her rouge.

"I didn't mean foreign Counts, but English nobility."

"But there is a whiskered foreigner paying mighty compliments to Miss Constance," pertinaciously continued the little woman. "Who is he?"

"Oh, a charming clever man, the Count of Rabelais de Chinon, a very rich Frenchman."

"Oh!" answered the red-faced woman, as she bustled away to look after her own chubby daughters.

Waltz followed waltz, and quadrille followed waltz, and the fair Constance danced with many admiring partners, three times also with Achille de Rabelais.

The Frenchman danced, as he did everything, with audacity. As, with a somewhat *risquée* pirouette, he squeezed the young beauty's waist, and deposited her, breathless, on a divan, Constance looked up. Her eyes met those of Augustus Bromley, and a deep blush of consciousness covered her forehead.

"Delicieuse, parole d'honneur, you waltz like an angel. You would turn every head in Paris."

## CHAPTER VI.

Constance Coxe was a very nice girl, though she looked nicer than she really was. She had, in fact, rather too much of what may be designated the financial manner to be pleasing to all persons. This Bromley perceived, and hoped hereafter to remedy.

The financial manner is the manner appertaining to the offspring of great fortunes made in trade. Constance could not be called vulgar, yet there was that about her which was not entirely opposed to vulgarity. The fact was, that she, like many of her class, had not partaken of that home education

which instils manner with mother's milk and daily bread. She had been very carefully instructed. She played music of the high classical school. Nay, more, she was well grounded therein, and could discourse of Sebastian Bach, Beethoven, quartettes, symphonies, and fugues in any letter of the alphabet. She likewise understood geology, admired Kingsley's writings, was not averse to insects, was strong in German literature, and subscribed to ragged schools and Mudie's library. Nathless, there was a twang about her not as true as the sterling of her father's bank. Her manners had not that repose which marked the caste of Lady Ilminster and her set. She laughed so loud as though who should prevent her. There was too much gush about her in her lighter moments; too much affectation of doing the right thing socially and morally, added to the apparent manifestation of a sentiment, which might or might not exist in reality, of conscious superiority over her fellow-women.

But though her manners were not really distinguished, it was difficult to discover where the flaw really existed.

They had been acquired second-hand from associates, and were not innate—so they had, perhaps, the appearance of second-hand goods. One or two stains were indelible, consequently covered over with an ornament not quite in place—but the rest

was varnished up satisfactorily, and looked almost like new.

She was not very clever, but having overcome a giggle natural to finance, she was serious, and, in her height and beauty, looked dignified and wise. Moreover, she was very much in love with Augustus Bromley, accepted his lessons with gratitude, and his reproofs with humility. She believed in his future as firmly as himself, and piqued herself as much on her worldly wisdom as on her disinterestedness in loving a man whom her mother disapproved, through ignorance, but whom she preferred as much from ambition as passion.

But on this evening she had avoided him and danced with the Count. It was not till late that Augustus could take her aside for a moment. With her arm on his he led her through the long chain of rooms. At length they reached a conservatory, occupied by couples, who, like themselves, sought for solitude. Secure in the absorption of others, he began—

"What is it, Constance, makes you avoid me to-night?"

"I do not avoid you. Unfortunately, nearly every time you have asked me to dance I have been engaged."

"Such has not generally been the case, Constance. You have, on other occasions, managed to secure me one or two dances in the course of the evening."

"But to-night I could not."

"You seem to have exercised the power in favour of that distinguished foreigner whom I brought here."

"Augustus, you are jealous."

"Jealousy does not exist in official life—that is to say, jealousy of women."

Constance played with her skirts nervously.

"Mamma desired me to be very civil to the Count."

"And very uncivil to me, I suppose; but the order has been repeated more than once without the same effect."

"But I must obey her."

"Certainly. Obey her! Let her choose a husband for you, and, in her perspicacity, she will select the Count. He has already fixed his attentions on you, and she is favouring them."

"Never. I will never marry him."

"Then there has been a question of it."

"Augustus, I can stand this no longer. For Heaven's sake, spare me. If you only knew all, and would trust in me—I cannot, at this moment, offend mamma."

"I do not wish you to offend her—but tell me, dear Constance, whence all this fear and flurry? You seem afraid of some great evil."

The tears no longer glittered in her eye. They fell fast on her dress. They were quite alone. Augustus took her hand.

"Tell me, dearest Constance," he said, "what is . . . ?"

She threw aside his hand with a warning gesture, for Lady Coxe stood before them.

"Come, Constance," she said, severely. "It is time to go 'ome."

"Thanks, my dear friend," whispered the Count to Augustus, as they were leaving the ball door. "You were pleading my cause. Honneur et Amitié."

And the Count disappeared in the distance, hopping.

"My dears," said Lady Coxe, as they drove home, tired and collapsed. "My dears, you 'ad better send for Mélanie to-morrow, to order dresses for Lady Ilminster's dejooner!"

## CHAPTER VII.

Augustus Bromley was of a character beyond the appreciation of the Lady Coxes of creation. To those who have made their way, none are acceptable whose way is not yet made, and for ought Lady Coxe knew, Bromley's might never carry him much further than the present stage.

Augustus Bromley was well connected. He possessed six hundred a-year of his own. He was private secretary to a cabinet minister. He was

but five-and-twenty years of age; but he was not good enough for Lady Coxe, the daughter of an upholsterer, whom Sir Jehoshaphat had married in perhaps the only weak moment of his life.

Lady Coxe had grand visions for her daughter. In these years of luxury and grandeur, where life is a burden under thousands, and where poverty starves on pine-apples, a humble Mr Bromley was beneath the betting of a Lady Coxe.

She dreamt with pride of the gay weddings from her house, where Countess Constance, in the flowing Brussels, should step grandly into the coronetted brougham; but Lady Coxe's dreams never descended to the interior of that daughter's household; nor could her convex mind descend to a beggarly domesticity of two thousand a-year, or to a bassinet containing any toothless original sinner below a viscount.

Yet perhaps Augustus Bromley may become all this. Coronets may drop upon his brow; and viscounts may hereafter acknowledge his paternity.

But Lady Coxe will not stoop to conquer. From her cradle she had soared at high game. She had ogled herself into the good graces of a banker, and she saw not why the adoption by her daughter of the same ocular process should not land them on a higher bracket of the social Walhalla. Better, according to her philosophy, marry a count and be-

come a beggar, than marry the beggar on the chance of obtaining the higher dignity.

The prefix of Mrs was odious to the dame who had begun life with no designation save Betsy. She had no more idea of station as apart from title, than of a bridecake without its white sugar envelope —of dress without diamonds.

Nevertheless, Augustus Bromley was her best chance in life. He had already, for a year, been her guardian angel. To him she was indebted for many an invitation, and for many a little service which others would have hesitated to render.

There was nothing extraordinary in the appearance of Augustus Bromley ; but in him there was that which is in men "who achieve what they wish to achieve." Who can define the quality which secures success? Those who possess it are not handsomer, richer, nay, often not cleverer than others. But speak with these men, young or old, and if you can boast knowledge of life to an amount no greater than a mustard-seed, you can predicate great things of them.

Bromley was tall, fair, reserved in manner, quaint in phrase when he liked, but to the world commonplace. Conversational proficiency is a dangerous gift, to be used only when the prime of life is past and its object achieved. In youth, ambition, silence, and obscurity are motive force.

Excite not the jealousy of rivals by the useless

exhibition of qualities. Seek not social success if you are a candidate for public honours. Society follows, it does not make, a reputation. Apparent frivolity with dogged determination, seeming modesty with undoubted audacity, deferential firmness with women, defiant conciliation with men, readiness to do kind turns, and power to resent slights, a smattering of universal knowledge, a power of cramming, and the gift of holding your own, are qualities which tend to success in the nineteenth century.

These endowments Bromley possessed in perfection, and Sir Jehoshaphat, that wily City banker, had found them out, and was turning them to account.

City bankers love to patronise young men of fashion. To patronise the son of a duke, they think, places them on a nearer equality with that duke. It annihilates the breadth of the counter, and sheds aristocratic essence, like mercy, on the giver as on the receiver.

O reader, struggling as you may be with your poverty, if you cannot be a man of wealth or of fame, pray to be a man of fashion.

If you cannot accumulate capital, accumulate the semblance of capital.

You would give your eyes to be director of an insurance company or a railway—become a man of fashion.

Does your banker ask you to dine—whom do you meet?—Men of fashion. He forms a new company—who form the direction?—Capital and fashion. With moderate abilities, the letters H.O.N. before your name are as valuable as the L.S.D. after it. Properly managed, a good club is equal to an almighty dollar. Extend your acquaintance, and then place them unconsciously under contribution.

It was by means such as these that Augustus Bromley had imperceptibly attained in society a certain unacknowledged power.

Having first laboured to obtain the reputation of a man rising in material life, fashion soon followed in the wake of a nascent fame.

He despised no one, but, on the contrary, sought all. Equally at home at Devonshire House or Canterbury Hall—at the Surrey Gardens, whether with Spurgeon or Alboni—at Cremorne or Dr Cumming's—he knew at once where to lay his hand on the particular man, woman, or child who would answer the purpose of the moment, however eccentric or unlooked for.

He could hunt up an entomologist in the City, or an actor at Lisson Grove—an astrologer at Brompton, a boatman at Wapping, or Lady Ilminster at Twickenham. Ministers of state were accessible to him as dentists; and few objects were beyond the circle of his determination.

He had met Constance some year and a half pre-

viously; and though she was then almost a child, he had determined to marry her.

His first step was no difficult one—to obtain her affections. His next, to superintend her education. In this task her youth assisted him, and his influence and counsels had saved her from that fast, pert tone and doubtful conversation which now contend with Puseyism, science, and prophecy in social life.

## CHAPTER VIII.

Count Rabelais woke one morning at a hotel in Jermyn Street. Springing, he alighted on the floor; then, seating himself on the bed, called for his servant.

"Timoléon, my boots!" he cried.

To some readers it may appear unpleasantly natural that the Count should call for those articles of dress without any preliminary ablution. But far be it from us to cast any slur on his cleanliness. That essentially British institution, the tub, does not come within the scope of Continental ethics. Other expedients serve their purpose. A warm bath removes all spots on their cleanliness—a bath renewed, as occasion may serve the individual, daily, three times a-week, weekly, fortnightly, monthly, or even yearly.

"Timoléon!" repeated the Count, in a still louder voice; but the valet answered not.

The Count was in a very light costume; nevertheless, while waiting for his servant's arrival, he proceeded to rouse himself by the execution, before the looking-glass, of a free and graceful dance.

As he was thus employed, a knock at the door recalled him to a sense of decorum.

"Who's there?" he cried, in broken English, unnecessary to repeat: "Timoléon?"

A female voice responded.

"Diable! where is that terrible Timoléon? Like Fontenelle's, my one servant serves me as badly as if I had twenty."

Meanwhile he had approached the door, and proceeded to begin a dialogue.

"Who want me?"

"A letter, sir."

"Give it my servant, and tell him to come here directly."

"If you please, sir, he's talking to my mistress down-stairs, and told me to bring the letter up to you."

"Times are pretty changed," soliloquised the Count, "when the valet flirts with the mistress, and sends the maid to converse with his master."

"And who may be your mistress, Mees?"

"Madame Carron."

"Diable! Madame Carron down-stairs! Does she wish to see me?"

"No; she only begs you to read this letter. She is giving Timoléon a message for you."

"Very well. Then will you have the goodness to stand near the hinges of the door, and to extend your hand while I make a little opening. You should not see me. I am not in a state for to be seen."

He opened a few inches of the door, and a small note was handed in. Tearing it open, he quietly read it. It was in French:—

"Come and dine with me to-day. I have something to communicate of importance, and that will assist your prospects. Yes or no will do. Can you lend me your servant to wait this evening?—Ever yours, Adelgonde Carron."

"Will you say to your mistress 'Yes,'" responded the Count; "and as you descend, desire that pig Timoléon to come up quickly."

And advancing again to the looking-glass with the same alacrity, the Count trod a light measure towards his razors. Scarcely had he begun to shave, however, when a thought flashed across his mind. He was engaged to dine with Lady Coxe.

"Diable!" he exclaimed; "here is a pretty mistake. Timoléon! Timoléon! Where is that bad citizen?"

But no answer was returned to his cries. He must still be talking to the *bonne* Carron.

"I must go and catch them before they have settled the dinner."

So, hastily clothing himself in a light jacket of embroidered silk, with trousers to match, a pair of slippers covered with gold, and a Turkish cap, he straightway coursed down the corridor towards the door.

As he reached the door of the hotel, who should he behold seated in a barouche with her daughter but Lady Coxe.

"'*Ow* de do, Congte?" cried the lady, vehemently.

The Count did not hesitate to walk into the street, notwithstanding his costume.

"I hope you are well, Miladi, after the exertions of last night; and Mademoiselle Florence I see laughing at my toilette—espiègle comme toujours—and Mademoiselle Constance more beautiful than ever."

"We are in very good 'ealth, thank you, Congte. We came to remind you of your promise to dine with us to-day."

"I should not be a good Frenchman to forget the commands of the charming Lady Cogues."

"Oh, Congte, you are so complimentary."

"The subject is one to inspire the least poetical of mortals, miladi."

"Well, I will not detain you, Congte. I see some one else is waiting for you. Gay man! A lady, I see."

"A compatriote, miladi—most distinguished person, Madame Carron."

"What! Madame Carron, the great actress? What a charming person she must be. Every one is raving about 'er—so good—so clever, I am told."

"She is charming!"

"Well, I will not keep you any longer, Congte. Good-bye. To-night at eight o'clock—not later, pray."

"Who could delay longer than possible the pleasure of seeing Miladi Cogues?"

"Ah, Congte——"

The carriage drove off with the rest of the lady's sentence.

The little brougham that stood modestly behind contained a young and beautiful woman, dressed as none can dress but a native of Paris. She was small and delicately made. At first sight, however, she would not have attracted more than usual attention. But a close observer would soon perceive that she was no ordinary person. Her massive forehead, her dark piercing eyes, and her sharply-cut lips, betrayed a mind far above the level of daily mortality.

There was little, however, in her hurried conversation of more than everyday interest. Yet her words seemed to have for the Count an inexplicable charm. He bowed, as in deference to her commands, and infused into his manner a respect

almost amounting to servility—very different from his ordinary manner.

"Achille," she said, "can you come and dine with me to-night?"

"No, Adelgonde. I ran down in this disguise to tell you it was impossible. I promised last night to dine with those people you have mentioned."

"Are you getting on well with them?"

"Passably. The mother, an impossible old woman, seems to encourage me, and I think I have obtained the co-operation of the young man who is paying court to one of the sisters."

"So you have fixed your thoughts on the tall and handsome one?"

"Precisely."

"It was the family, then, in that barouche?"

"It was so, Adelgonde."

"Hum, hum! We are not, then, getting on so badly after all?"

"By no means."

"Well, as you must dine with them, it cannot be helped: but I wished you to-day to dine with me, as I think I have discovered an additional means of success."

"Indeed! What is it, Adelgonde?"

"I cannot tell you now. Later you will know. In fact, I myself do not know the secret; but I intended you to meet the original possessor, who might be induced to reveal it to you."

"Nay; do tell me what it is."

"I never tell an untruth, Achille. I do not know it," answered the actress, sternly. Then her features assumed a softer expression.

"Do you require anything else, Achille—any further supply?"

"No; thanks, belle Adelgonde; a thousand thanks. I was at piquet in the afternoon of yesterday."

"Then, *à ce soir*. I shall expect you after your dinner, and will try to retain my guest. Recollect, I shall keep the box free for the next two nights in case you wish to offer it. It will be no small gift, as every place is taken, and the house becomes fuller nightly."

"Thanks—a thousand thanks. The old lady is not very strong in French. But I will bring her. Oh yes, I will make her come. A box at a theatre is an admirable place to pay court to a young girl, *à l'Anglaise*."

Adelgonde smiled as she bent her head and desired the carriage to leave the hotel.

But the smile was one of pity, and also had in it much of contempt.

## CHAPTER IX.

It was late when the Count reached the lodging of the actress in Belgravia. Up the narrow stairs

he ran, two steps at a time, until he reached the landing-place.

The house occupied by Madame Carron was nothing very much out of the common. It was, in fact, an ordinary London lodging-house, and showed every sign of its condition. The stairs were Belgravian, consequently of stone; but wherever wood was visible there was a want of paint that betokened a want of capital; while the shabby paper, stained here and there with finger-marks, and disfigured by lumps of wax, dropped by the bed-going inhabitants, showed a carelessness that little harmonised with the enormous salary attributed to the actress by public rumour.

Nevertheless, as the visitor ascended to the apartment of the actress, he could perceive gradual indications of a higher civilisation. The floor of the little landing was covered with a piece of new Axminster carpet. A neat looking-glass in a carved oak frame was fixed against the wall. A fleecy sheepskin opposed the progress of a draught, that, under normal circumstances, found a passage beneath the doorway. An alabaster lamp, swinging from the ceiling, cast a light sufficient to show the beauties and to conceal the deficiencies.

It was in this little corner that Count Rabelais stood for a moment. With all his frivolity and apparent carelessness of manner, he evidently felt some tremor at his approaching interview with the

actress. Pausing, therefore, for a moment, he listened to discover the sound of any voice that might betray the presence of the actress's companion; while, to conceal his purpose from any possible spectator, he arranged his hair, his whiskers, and cravat.

At length he opened the door and found Madame Carron alone. She was seated near the fireplace reading a volume of Molière. And in the arrangement of the apartment was visible the same woman's hand that had cast a refining influence over the ante-chamber. White muslin curtains, evidently not the choice of a professional lodging-house keeper, added to the cleanliness, while not destroying the harmony of the furniture,—a few tiger-skins and Cashmere shawls, thrown here and there, as though accidentally, over the chairs and sofas, concealed the original dinginess of the chintz coverings. A cloth of rich velvet was spread over the table, and covered with small objects collected from many countries. Rare flowers were placed in a stand near the window, while two alabaster lamps, matching with that we have already seen, cast the same furtive light. A small shaded lamp, placed near the actress on a small stand of Italian mosaic, illuminated the volume before her.

"Am I late, Leontine?" asked the actor, in a tone of voice very different from that in which he had beguiled the fancy of Lady Coxe.

"Too late and too early," responded the actress, laying aside the book.

"You are oracular to-night."

"With very little reason. The person I asked you to meet was obliged to go away, but has promised to return. I told her you might be of use to her. But she has been forced to attend the toilette of one of her best customers."

"You seem to have chosen a nice society for me, Adelgonde. A *couturière*, I suppose."

"A respectable person, Achille—more respectable, perhaps, even than yourself. She is opulent, Achille; you are not."

"I did not know you were worldly enough and English enough to measure respectability by wealth, Madame."

"Her livelihood is gained by her own exertions —yours is not." The actress spoke in a tone of some bitterness.

"And do you reproach me, Adelgonde?"

"No, Achille. I only remind you of what you are too apt to forget."

"Well, do not let us quarrel about terms," rejoined Rabelais, querulously. "Who is it that graces your salon this evening?"

"Madame Mélanie."

"And who is Madame Mélanie?"

"The first dressmaker in Europe."

"Belle position!"

"It is a position, Achille, to be the first in any line of life."

"And you have forced me away from a pleasant party to spend an evening with a dressmaker. Thank you, Adelgonde, you want me to marry *la petite* Coxe. I am making great game with miladi, her mother, getting on famously. I rush away to keep an engagement to meet a person likely to assist my aim, and to fulfil your wishes; and I find that you bring me to exchange confidences with a *lingère*. Really, Adelgonde, you might have chosen some other occasion."

"Believe me, if you play your cards properly you will not repent it."

## CHAPTER X.

Madame Mélanie was a milliner much affected in aristocratic and financial circles.

Finance sympathises with Hungary, Poland, and oppressed nationalities, and Mélanie appertained to this section of mortality. Moreover, she made dresses beautifully, and the employment of her gratified the double sentiments of charity and vanity.

Mélanie was the daughter of a French maid-servant, in the service of a Hungarian lady. Brought up in her maternal profession—for her sire was not

known—she lived under the roof of her Hungarian mistress till what she was pleased to call the "Hongarian Strockle." Of this event she narrated striking scenes. Assuming to herself the name of her mistress, whom she had betrayed, she told how Haynau had threatened her with chastisement, and how, barefooted, she had reached a place of safety. More than once she had been invited to publish her adventures, but she was far too wise. Her ancient nobility obtained for her much greater consideration as a seamstress, and a better livelihood than Kossuth himself could procure; and in the humility of her station she was more free from detection than in a more elevated sphere.

She had begun poorly enough—working away gradually, and accumulating capital by labour and saving, by gifts from her patronesses, and also by occasionally abstracting small pieces of jewellery and money from the aristocratic dressing-rooms to which, in her capacity as a distressed noblewoman, she obtained freer access than others of her equals. True, she soon gave up the latter pursuit. Not only was it dangerous, but increasing business, by removing her from want, enabled her to resist temptation. Still she derived considerable emolument from what Italian servants term "*incerti*." She did not object, for a consideration, to usurp the office of the Postmaster-General, nor did she refuse the shelter of her roof when business or charity

required an interview between opulent monades of opposite sexes. On the whole, Madame Mélanie is a deserving creature. The sums she spends in alms astound the more credulous of her customers. She has sent more than one packet of linen to the lying-in hospital of the parish, and the initial "M., through a friend," for Garibaldi's muskets, has been traced to the same benefic source. She will not marry again, for she never can forget the Count of her early days, when they lived and loved in Hungary; but a French courier, about three years younger than herself, dwells in her house under the designation of adopted son, keeps her accounts, and transacts business with her solicitor.

Such was the person let loose in her respectable household by that careful mother, Lady Coxe. 'Ungary has done much for many disreputable foreigners. The respectability of a few has floated the depravity of the many.

On the credit of a lying assumption, Madame Mélanie had access to the homes and toilet-tables of England which would be denied to any respectable Englishwoman of the same class, however deserving.

"Good morning, Mélanie," said Lady Coxe, as she lay back in her *chaise longue*.

"Good morning, miladi—always so *charmante* and *gracieuse*."

"Git along, Mélanie," replied miladi, playfully:

when away from her daughters she laid aside that staidness of demeanour maintained before them towards her inferiors.

"Mélanie, we are going to Lady Ilminster's *dejooner*."

"Miladi go everywhere fashionable."

"Oh yes, Mélanie, and I don't know 'ow ever I shall be able to bear up against it. I feel so exhausted."

"Oh, miladi does not care herself."

"What can I do, Mélanie?—I feel so weak!"

"Miladi look very pale."

"I think I must send for Dr Leadbitter."

"If miladi would take a little drop of port-wine once or twice in the day."

"You really think so, Mélanie?"

"Yes, truly, miladi."

"Just like a good creature open that cupboard. I always keep a bottle there in case Sir Jehoshaphat should drop in; you will find a glass. Per'aps there are two. Bring them, Mélanie, and take a glass yourself."

The seamstress did as she was bid, and, placing the decanter and glasses respectfully on the table and in the manner of a skilled practician, she sat herself down in the same deferential attitude near her employer.

Lady Coxe took a bumper; then she took another, and declared herself better.

Madame Mélanie's first glass was not half emptied.

"Well, Mélanie, what would you advise about my dress for this party? You know it is to be very shwosi."

"Miladi shall be the best dressed and the youngest-looking miladi in the house."

"Git along, Mélanie," retorted miladi, stealthily filling herself another bumper.

A flush pervaded the cheek of the matron. Perhaps it was of pride.

"Miladi, I recommend moire antique—magenta, with quilled ribbons — chapeau of blonde with magenta trimmings—parasol to match."

"Your taste is so good, Mélanie."

"Magenta so well become miladi. Bootiful complexion—she young as Miss Constance."

"Oh, you flattering thing! but what will you give my daughters—the Miss Coxes?"

"Oh, I talk to them myself. They not be Miss Coxe long, I think. Miss Florence make a very nice bride, and Miss Constance bootiful Comtesse."

"Git along; but what do you mean? Fill your glass." Lady Coxe as a fugleman showed the way.

"They tell me such a 'andsome man want to marry her—noble and rich."

"English or furrin, Mélanie?"

"Not English."

"You know 'im to be rich?"

"Oh yes, I know him rich. Miladi know poor woman like me obliged to make affair with all sort of people. One of my customers, Mademoiselle Dulaugier of Opera Comique. I send all her bill to Comte Rabelais, and he pay, what you call, on the nail."

"Very satisfactory," responded Lady Coxe. "Let me 'ope Constance may be the means of leading 'im to better things."

"Indeed let us hope so," said Mélanie, and this time she held her glass to her lips for some seconds, though the liquid within was not much diminished.

"Nothing is settled, believe me, Mélanie. But then the world is talking of it."

"Of nothing else. Who occupy London so much as your family, miladi? The Duchesse of Wiltshire, when I go to her, say to me, 'Mélanie, tell me all about that bootiful Miladi Coques and her bootiful family. None so bootiful as the mother.'"

At this moment the door admitted Florence and Constance.

Mélanie rose in admiration.

"What bootiful colour! What roses in cheeks!"

The girls acknowledged her salute, and the rose left the cheek of Constance.

Mélanie whispered Lady Coxe, "I will make for Mademoiselle Constance bootiful dress like

used to wear La Dulaugier — the Comte's own choice."

"Mélanie is come to take orders for Lady Ilminster's dejooner."

"I shall have a very simple dress," said Florence.

"And so shall I," chimed in Constance, in a voice low and tremulous.

"Impossible!" broke in the seamstress—"impossible!"

"Nonsense!" said Lady Coxe.

"You will ruin Constance, Mélanie," retorted Florence.

"Mademoiselle Constance will marry a rich man, and think nothing of the trifles she spends now," responded Mélanie, somewhat tartly.

"You know what to make," said Lady Coxe, in a voice that admitted of no reply.

With an obsequious courtesy Mélanie left the room, and Constance, retiring to her own chamber, threw herself on her bed and wept bitterly.

## CHAPTER XI.

It was dusk when Mélanie left the house—that dangerous summer dusk, when that is seen which you wish concealed, but when you can with difficulty perceive what you wish to discover.

Mélanie wended her way towards Grosvenor

Street, where she resided. As she reached the corner of the Square, however, she stopped at the corner of Charles Street, under a gas-lamp.

She did not wait many minutes when a Clarence stopped at the crossing.

A man jumped out. It was Count Rabelais.

Holding open the door of the carriage, he admitted the dressmaker, who took her seat next a woman already inside. Jumping in again with a bow, the Count gave an order to the coachman, who dashed off under the gas-lamp.

Augustus Bromley, who was passing at the moment, saw the whole transaction, as well as the face of the third occupant. It was that of Madame Carron. For the first time an idea entered his mind, how much like the face of the Count was to that of the actress.

Hurrying homeward to write a line of excuse to a friend with whom he was engaged to dine, he seated himself not many minutes later in a stall of the St James's Theatre.

The first play, a short one, was over, and in the next Madame Carron was to appear. Her part that night involved one or two songs, and a piano was wheeled into the orchestra.

Bromley, who was sitting at one end, could see Madame Carron in the wings with Angelo Magens, a pianist and composer of some celebrity. They were together engaged earnestly over a sheet of

music paper, beating time and giving or demanding explanation.

At length Bromley perceived that the play was about to begin, from Madame Carron plucking at her skirts, and from Mr Magens's appearance in the orchestra. The musician turned round, and, at a signal from Bromley, came to the neighbourhood of his stall, and leaned over to speak to him.

"How d'ye do, Angelo?" asked Bromley. "Ages since I've seen you. How are Mrs Angelo and Adelaide?"

"Quite well, thank you, Mr Bromley. How well you're looking!"

"Rather hard at work, that's all."

"I can understand that, in your important avocations."

"By the way, Angelo, do you know the Carron well?"

"Well, Mr Bromley, she's been very kind to a poor man like me."

"Do you think we've time to go round and have a glass of sherry?"

"Not now; at the end of the next act;" and the bell rang for the curtain to rise. As it rose, Bromley perceived behind Madame Carron the figure of Rabelais.

The act was soon over, and Magens came for his glass of sherry. Bromley led him to the public-house adjoining, and the liquor was poured out.

As they both sipped it, Bromley again began, "How well she did that last scene!"

"Admirably; she is a wonderful woman!"

"Indeed she is, Magens. By the way, where is Monsieur Carron?"

"Oh! he is dead, I believe."

"Then is that story true about her?"

"If you have heard anything against her reputation, I can undertake to declare it false."

Little Magens, when under the united influence of sentiment and sherry, could be very fiery.

He was a grateful homuncule.

"Of *course* not," rejoined his interrogator. "I mean that other story."

"Are you trying to pump me, Mr Bromley?"

"It would take a cleverer man than me to do that, Angelo—another glass—there's lots of time. We've only been five minutes, and the *entr'acte* at a French play is never less than a quarter of an hour." (Glasses filled.) "You were saying——"

"Well, the only story I have ever heard is about her family. They say, with I do not know what foundation, that she is of a good family, and is devoting all her profits to the support of it. She certainly does not live in the style of a person earning the immense salaries she receives."

"Rabelais, I suppose, knows all about it."

Magens shook his head, swallowed the remainder of his glass, and silently led the way back to the theatre.

"By the way, do you know anything of Madame Mélanie, the seamstress? She is much employed by actresses, I believe? A young lady was asking me, whether she made Mademoiselle Dulaugier's ballet-dresses."

"I know her very little myself. Mrs Magens knows her."

"Well, Magens, good evening. Can you come and dine with me to-morrow at the Garrick?"

"To-morrow, I am engaged here all the evening, and I suppose your hours are fashionable."

"Well, another day."

When he resumed his stall, Bromley perceived that a box near the stage was newly filled.

He looked up, and there was Lady Coxe and her three daughters.

Near Constance sat the Count. Her eye caught his, and she blushed deeply.

Bromley went revolving in his mind many things. At length he sauntered into the box.

The Count greeted him with unusual civility. Lady Coxe invited him to a chair next her.

"Mr Bromley," she whispered, "do me a favour. The Congte is most anxious to go to Lady Ilminster's. Can you, do you think—can you manage this?"

"Impossible, my dear Lady Coxe. I have already exceeded my powers."

A wink, supposed to be imperceptible, announced

to the Count the result of the negotiation. A dead silence ensued. When Bromley left the box, no effort was made to detain him.

## CHAPTER XII.

It was early the following afternoon when Bromley took a light dinner at his club. The waiters, as they brought him portions of soup and fish, speculated on the causes which induced Mr Bromley to dine at four o'clock. In the hall he had left a carpet-bag containing six bottles of sherry and two of whisky, one of Curaçoa, and one of pale brandy.

He was not long at his dinner. Having finished, he sent for a cab, and, placing in it his carpet-bag, desired the driver to take him to the Strand to a celebrated fish-shop. Here he bought two lobsters, two bundles of dried sprats, a pork-pie, a Bologna sausage, two loaves of brown bread, and a pound of butter. The civil shopman, at Bromley's request, sent out for some fine Spanish onions, which were added to the packet. With these provisions Bromley ordered himself to Kennington.

The driver at length drew up as directed at a nursery garden. Here Bromley alighted, paid his fare, and, shouldering his baggage, walked up the garden path.

"Is Mrs Magens at home?" he asked a maid-servant.

"Yes, sir, she's up-stairs."

"Will you tell her I'm here? How are you, my dear?"

"Very well, thank you, sir. It's some time since we saw you."

"Yes, my dear, and I think you've grown. Will you take some of these parcels, while I take the others, and put them in the drawing-room?"

"It looks as if it held good things, sir."

"You're a knowing young creature, my dear. Just go and tell your mistress I am here."

Bromley knew it would be a long time before mistress would make her appearance. As he sat in the little sitting-room, 12 feet by 8, he heard cries for warm water. "Jane, where's the soap?—My brush, Jane, quick!—Where are them pins?" which told how the lady was occupied.

Half an hour at least must elapse before the appearance of Mrs Magens, and this period Bromley divided between reading the 'Era,' which lay on the table, and drumming thereon.

Mr Angelo Magens was the natural son of a rackety Irish peer; at least so report said, and there was circumstantial evidence in support of the theory. Angelo had brothers, but they were not a bit like himself. Lord Rattlecormick had never taken any notice of them as he had of

Angelo. The cast of Angelo's face was decidedly Rattlecormick, and so was his character—quiet in manner, but reckless and thoughtless, a mixture of good nature, common sense, loose principle, and imprudence. From his childhood Angelo had lived exclusively with Lord Rattlecormick, with the exception of a short interval, during which his patron had managed to thrust him into the Navy. The life did not suit young Angelo, accustomed as he was to the rough luxury of Castle Rattlecormick, the good-natured and reckless liberality of the peer, who acted *in loco parentis*, and boon companions, who enlivened that patrician hearth.

So young Magens one morning left H.M.S. Bruiser in Cork Roads without leave, and betook himself without invitation to the House of Rattlecormick, to pass his time in warbling songs to the crowd of guests, to perform odd jobs on the premises, and to unfit himself for doing his duty in that state of life to which it might please Providence to call him.

Thus days and years passed, till Angelo was about twenty. He had picked up a certain knowledge of music. The village priest, skilled in thorough bass, had taught him the mysteries of counterpoint. Nature had blessed him with an agreeable tenor voice, and a rather agreeable manner, and a very decided taste for alcohol. Just at this particular juncture, Lord Rattlecormick died.

As might have been expected, no will was found. Angelo was thrown on his own resources—viz., one hundred pounds, the remnant of divers tips from his patron, a suit of clothes or two, and such expectations as might be warranted by the extensive acquaintance and clientela of his late father or patron.

He set up as a music-master. He composed pretty little songs, popular from their melodies. He even aspired to an opera, and was not wholly unsuccessful. Once he hired a theatre for himself, and was wholly unsuccessful. At one time he was poor, at another time he was not rich; but one day he would have nothing, the next a considerable sum of money. He was like those figures one sees in a bottle, which go dancing up and down according to the pressure on the cover. The accidents of his fortune were abrupt and immoderate. Now at the bottom of the bottle with a sudden fall—now at the top with as unexpected a rebound — seldom in the centre, but when there wriggling and twisting and curveting,—discontented for mediocrity, and burning to risk great success or great disaster on the turn of the nearest die. But with increasing years the taste of Angelo for alcohol increased, specially with reference to sherry. He had a mania for that particular beverage, and he passed but few hours of the day without appealing to that cherished friend. He was well known at the public-houses of the metropolis,—at some of them, I fear, too well known

to insure the gratification of his tastes. He was always convivial, however; always hospitable, always willing to accept hospitality. When in funds he would volunteer a glass of sherry at his own expense; when not in the best plight, he would volunteer it at yours. In early days Augustus's friends often declared that Angelo had led him into expenses and extravagance. It may be so; but in justice to his memory, Augustus often declared his belief that not a sixpence more was spent for Angelo than Angelo ever spent for him.

His wife was a very different kind of person. The daughter of a chemist at Worcester, and possessed of a good voice, the musical festivals, and the love of Church dignitaries for the *ars musica*, had indicated music as her profession. As a little girl, her talents in this respect had made her a favourite in the cathedral town, and she could with veracity boast acquaintance with bishops, deans, and canons, whose names sounded oddly enough when coming from her lips. Nevertheless these worthy and guileless men had contributed to her education, proudly looking forward to the time when her rich contralto should resound through their own cathedral, and they should share in the plaudits showered on their pupil and *protégée*. So they sent her to study in London,—and she did study in London. She came out in London; sang

in an oratorio, and created a sensation. But Kate Robins was a peculiar person. She was the daughter of a chemist, and in her physical composition there was much oxygen of a certain quality—not enough, however, to feed the vestal flame. Moreover, she was very pretty, with an arch smile. She sang little songs with ineffable grace. So no wonder she studied the doctrine of affinities. A cathedral town presented but few attractions. Deans were atoms of a nature not sufficiently volatile. She found the obstacles in the way of Platonism so numerous as to be absolutely insurmountable. So she assumed the toga affected by her equivalents in Babylon. She drove in little carriages, and radiated in fine linen. She accepted engagements at theatres, took parts where a good leg, an arch smile, and a rich voice were everything requisite; earned a good livelihood from her art, and a considerable amount of pocket-money from her artlessness.

Hers was a pleasant Bohemian life till she was five-and-thirty. The bishops and the deans, the friends of her youth, were replaced—in another fashion, be it understood—by the young nobles, the friends of her womanhood. As the spiritual peerage had contributed to the formation, so did the temporal assist in the completion of her education. This went on very well for some time. But at length the contralto rather deteriorated; the

arch smile partook rather of the stereotype. Managers were no longer so eager. Dukes began to cease their visits to her greenroom. Scarlet and fine linen are expensive in the absence of means to purchase them. Kate Robins found her assets running low; while several tradesmen, heretofore satisfied by the dukes, were not so civil as formerly. So, taking a judicious resolution, she determined on a provincial tour, relying for rural successes on her fading reputation. She planned with a friendly author an attractive entertainment. She engaged Magens, who had then just culminated, as her accompanyist, and she sallied forth with Angelo from Babylon to fresh fields and pastures new. For economy's sake they occupied the same apartments, till, for propriety's sake, they assumed the same name. They went the round of England and Ireland earning a livelihood and realising a good round sum, not sufficient, however, to meet their joint liabilities. Therefore, as assets would go farther when legally united than when filtered by division, as union in fact is force, Angelo obtained from the Church a benediction on the marriage already practically solemnised, turned his wife's brevet rank into substantive rank; and having thus consolidated their names and their liabilities, went through the Insolvent Court like a man, and, in purging himself, whitewashed his wife's account-book simultaneously with her reputation. From

that moment Mrs Magens collapsed into private life. A long and severe illness deprived her of all that remained of looks, voice, and attraction. She became a good wife, a prudent housekeeper, endeavoured to remedy by self-denial the dilapidations inflicted by sherry on their small means, incited her husband to exertion, made his house as pleasant as possible, and retained nothing of her former life but an unattractive girl she designated her niece, and a dramatic phraseology.

In his early youth, Bromley had nursed thoughts of studying music, and hence his first acquaintance with Magens. Through his agency the young man had made the acquaintance of gentlemen and ladies acquainted with the theatrical profession, not all of them of the highest caste. One whole winter he had spent in their exclusive society. He had learnt their ways, their tastes, their virtues, and their weaknesses. Lobsters were amongst the tastes of Mrs Magens. She cultivated them with a sauce which was a virtue; while her devotion to sprats, or to boiled onions, may be classed among the more venial weaknesses of that estimable matron.

At length the door creaked up-stairs, and a rustling overheard betokened that such preparations were completed as she had undertaken for Bromley's reception. A note in G was heard quavering —as though in innocence of heart.

"Bravo, my songstress," murmured, or rather

soliloquised, Bromley. "Now for the roulade;" and there sure enough it came. "And now for Floreski as she comes down-stairs."

The thoughts of no medium could have been more rapid. The voice, or rather the remnant of a voice, descended the stairs, slowly and musingly, warbling that well-known and beautiful romance—

> "Adieu, my Floreski, for ever,
> And welcome the sorrows I prove.
> Why, Fate, still delights thou to sever
> Two bosoms united by love?"

The last notes floated in the air as the door opened, and in rushed Mrs Magens nicely got up in a drab silk dress.

"How d'ye *do*, Mr Bromley, my kyind friend?" She held out both hands, and emphasised the "*do*," after the manner of genteel comedy.

"Charming as ever, or may I be freckled," responded Bromley, in the same tone.

"'Tis ages since we met. Let me look at ye." She drew him towards the window, and scanned his features anxiously.

"A shade of care has fallen across that brow since last we met. Let's see how long ago is it? A year—no—can it be? Time spares us not, Mr Bromley."

"It spares the beautiful Magens."

"Flatterer—the same as ever—the same gay-hearted, kyind——"

"A truce, I beseech ye," broke in Bromley. "In yonder basket I have brought an offering I fain would make your household deities — some few articles, little luxuries, sent me from the country."

The country always served as a veil in which to envelope Bromley's presents to Mrs Magens. Had he avowed the purchase, she would have been offended or feigned offence.

But the country saved her pride.

"From the country, Mr Bromley—from some kyind old aunt, I warrant me, or, mayhap, a grandmother. Jane!"

"Women are ever thoughtful, lady," responded Bromley.

Jane entered the room.

"Open the basket, maiden."

"I knowed as it was full of good things."

"Pity the poor vulgarian!"

"Ingins, I do declare!" cried the maiden. "My, what fine ingins!"

"The produce of your land, doubtless, Mr Bromley."

"And sprats—oh my!"

The mouth of Mrs Magens was watering beyond concealment.

"And lobsters—oh my, what lobsters!"

Mrs Magens could stand it no longer.

"The cares of a household do not degrade a

woman, Mr Bromley. B' your leave, I'll go and see them lobsters properly served up."

"Perhaps you will allow me to partake your meal?"

"Of course," screeched Mrs Magens from the adjacent kitchen, where, had Bromley seen her, he would have discovered the skirts of her garment already pinned round the waist of the neat-handed Phyllis.

It was not very long before the repast was ready, and Bromley sat, opposite his hostess, at a little table spread with a clean cloth, decorated with some spoons rescued from Mr Commissioner, a nickel cruet-stand, and two carnations.

"I do love this new Russian fashion," observed Mrs Magens, as a species of grace.

Half a lobster fell before her.

"In that carpet-bag, I have ventured to bring, for Angelo, a few bottles of sherry, of a particular quality, lately sent me by some friends from the country."

"How very thoughtful! Don't trouble yourself —allow me." The phraseology was less flowery, and the bottle was soon uncorked.

At length the meal was over. The onions had been discussed—a portion of the feast had been reserved for Angelo—another portion allotted to Jane—candles were introduced—Bromley was allowed to light a cigar, and to mix a glass of whisky

and water—even Mrs Magens sipped a glass of toddy, and the room was soon as redolent as a tap.

"Now, Mr Bromley, I daresay, when in that brilliant world which your position throws open to you—in that world of beauties and nobles, you often long for the repose of an evening like this, passed equably in gentle converse, and with a frugal but wholesome meal to which fatigue has lent an appetite and friendship a relish."

"Very true, Mrs Magens. And your society is especially delightful. Angelo, poor man, is deprived of it. He is very busy."

"Very much so. The Fates are propitious."

"I hope he is making a pot of money."

"Fie, what a word! Heaven ever befriends the just."

"Money is wanted at present, Mrs Magens. In these days, a man with a good income is not a rich man."

"Indeed, it is true—too true. The extravagance of the age is hawful."

Sometimes Mrs Magens was off her guard, and as uncertain about her aspirates as a beginner in the Greek tongue.

"It is indeed," answered Bromley, "awful——"

"Awful," repeated Mrs Magens, correcting herself.

"Dress is ruinous for ladies."

"Yet gaudy attire is no evidence of a sound *h*eart."

The *h* was inserted this time with a *slam*.

"Very true, often the reverse; but it is no less ruinous."

"The sums lavished on it are enormous, Mr Bromley."

"I daresay many ladies in your profession spend large sums on their toilettes."

"Enormous; why, there's Miss Sepop of the Bower has a new dress every night. Mrs Macvey of the Blackfriars is never satisfied without embroidery all round."

"Whom do you consider the best dressmaker, Mrs Magens? your taste is so good."

"Why, for myself, I should say, Madame Mélanie Mickiewicz. She is generally known as Madame Mélanie. Poor thing! She is a Hungarian princess. Her story is harrowing—harrowing—Ha'nau——"

"I think I have heard it—poor thing! Do you know her?"

"Intimately—a charming person—quite the lady."

"I suppose she has lots of stories—of experience."

"Delightful creature. She was telling me the other day of the awful effects this extravagance produces on the high-born and wealthy. Many young ladies run up bills of enormous amounts, trusting to their marriage for the means of payment. But gentlemen do not marry."

"And their bills run on."

"Exactly—you have hit my very thought. There

is one family, she tells me, where mother and daughters are deeply in debt to her, none of them daring to confide in the others for fear that the father and husband—a very strict man—should discover their embarrassments."

"Did she tell you who they were, Mrs Magens?"

"No; but she would if I asked her, in a moment."

"I daresay, Mrs Magens, your own dresses amount to no small sum."

"Oh, I am so very 'umble."

"But have you no little bill with your friend,—no little sum Angelo ignores?"

"How cunning you are, Mr Bromley! However, it don't amount to a very large figure."

"By the way, is not Madame Mélanie a friend of Madame Carron's? I see them driving together."

"Yes; I believe they knew each other in Hungary. There, again, Madame Carron is deeply in debt to her."

"But I thought she made such enormous sums. Does she owe more than you, Mrs Magens?"

"Oh, my liability is not more than what you would call a 'pony,' Mr Bromley."

"But how does Madame Carron manage to contract debts?"

"She is obliged to dress expensively for her parts, and she is very charitable, especially to some worthless relative who absorbs all her income."

"A husband?"

"No, a brother, I believe; although Mélanie is so charming a person, it is horrible to be under an obligation to her."

"Well, Mrs Magens, I daresay we can find some way of relieving you from yours."

"I could never think of such a thing, Mr Bromley."

"Well, do me a little favour; we are old friends, Mrs Magens. Find out the name of the family who are so much indebted, and of Madame Carron's brother. Write to me."

"Certainly, I will. There's a knock. Won't you stay to see Angelo?"

The door opened, and Mélanie entered the room.

## CHAPTER XIII.

Lady Ilminster was a very charming woman—kind, gracious, and good-natured. Very rich herself, the wife of a rich man, she delighted in throwing about her the pleasures which wealth confers, and in inviting others to share them.

She was sensuous,—that is to say, she loved good things. She loved to gaze on pretty and happy faces, and the harmony of colours. She loved the sound of music, the smell of flowers, the gliding sensation of a boat; nay, she was not averse to a good dinner, and quaffed iced champagne, not to

excess, but *à discrétion*. She had no children herself, and so surrounded herself with those who loved her. These were not toadies, but men of equal rank, whose tastes chimed in with her own. At first she was accused of flirting; but the scandal soon subsided, for it was pure scandal. Even had there been any foundation, a hostess so bountiful would soon have overcome the charge; but with Lady Ilminster there were no thoughts of evil. She did a thousand things others could not do. She rode, she drove, she even smoked, as fancy prompted her; but she was faithful to her lord, though, perhaps, her example stimulated in others freedoms of which she disapproved. Like many women whose conduct is pure, her conversation was not the reflex of her conduct.

The party Lady Ilminster gave was to be, as Lady Coxe had declared, very "*shwosi*." Her recovery from indisposition was the pretext assigned—one of those excuses the hospitable find when, for the sake of pleasure to others, or for the maintenance of their social renown, they think fit to display their leading quality.

Preparations had been made, astounding in their extravagance and beauty. The grounds, which sloped down to the river, were covered with flowers, tents, and temporary palaces. Lady Ilminster had taste enough to draw that delicate line which separates fairy-land from a tea-garden.

In one of these temporary structures a large party of young ladies and gentlemen were assembled eating ices and drinking tea. Lady Coxe was presiding in her magenta dress, nodding from the heat, and fanning with magenta fan her magenta countenance. Florence was talking merrily with a young guardsman; but the conversation generally assumed that tone which, as Mr Whiting describes it, smacks less of the lady than of the reduplicate Φ.

"Let us take up our position here," said one young lady to her partner; "I hate being with the swells."

Lady Coxe heard this; her face more magenta than ever. She ranked herself with the nobility.

"Did you see Croquet in the park yesterday," asked another, "with the prettiest pony?"

"Yes; but not such a habit as Julia Fitzwiggins," burst in a third. "What a waist she has!"

"Quite like an hour-glass," illustrates a guardsman, aloud.

"I doubt if it be all real," interposed another young lady.

"What are you talking of?" asked the guardsman.

"Of course the rest must be filled with sand," retorts the first.

"A sand-glass in every respect," murmured Whiting.

Lady Coxe nods, puffs, fans, and smiles, not quite understanding what Mr Whiting meant.

"Toole, who makes her habits, declares she pads them with brown paper," resumed the guardsman.

"I'm sure I wouldn't purchase a waist at that price," rejoined the partner.

"You've a very pretty little one of your own, Lady Janet."

Oh, young ladies, young ladies, why are you in such haste for the freedom and abundance of married life? Why compete for magenta dresses with I won't say what? Why adopt the language of I won't say whom? You may attract young men from the society of the first by using the phraseology of the second, but will you retain them with you? They may in time give up Richmond dinners and midnight orgies with Thaïs, for a quiet meal, loving looks, and worthy sentiments with Lucretia. If this will not attract them, so much the worse for them and so much the better for Lucretia. But Lucretia will never win them by the arts of Thaïs. Thaïs, on her own ground, will always beat Lucretia. She knows her weapons better. However far Lucretia may go, she can never come up to Thaïs. Thaïs has a grammar of her own, a syntax, and a prosody—winged words and winged actions. Lucretia may study the accidence, she can never master the rhetoric. Lucretia may unveil her ankle, Thaïs blushes not if her garter be exposed. Think you Lord Tom Noddy

will marry Lucretia if she shows him her garter? Thaïs dresses expensively. Thousands will not pay her milliner's bills. But at the end of six months or a year Lord Tom Noddy leaves her, and she retrenches.

But if Lucretia rivals Thaïs in her dress, Lord Tom Noddy knows that, if he marries her, six months will not see the end of it. Sir Cresswell Cresswell even cannot untie the knots of ribbon and the tangles of lace which figure on that long lithographed linear document, and the lands of Noddy will soon melt in the basilisk smiles of furbelowed Lucretia.

Thaïs is a dashing river, which receives a thousand tributaries, the drainings of the country and the sewers of the town, till it is lost in a morass or absorbed in the ocean. But Lucretia should be a gentle brook, pure from its source, content to murmur innocently and calmly onward, reflecting the light of heaven in its pellucid waters, till it mingles with and strengthens a stronger current than itself. To such as these, tranquil and tranquillising, will man return for happiness and peace, when, jaded with the roar of cities and the struggle of life, he seeks to reconcile his existence with his Creator, to pursue and accomplish his allotted task before the night cometh.

"'*Ow* de do?" said Lady Coxe, blandly, as Bromley appeared for the first time.

Drawing a chair near the table, he took his seat near Constance.

"You are very late," she began.

"I have had so much to do to-day; some one ought to write a Song of the Shirt for me. Scratch, scratch, scratch—in lieu of stitch, stitch, stitch."

"But recollect all the good you are doing," answered Constance.

"Yes, that is a reflection which conveys great comfort to me."

Augustus smiled somewhat in his answer.

"Why are you always sarcastic?"

"I feel I am very sincere."

"You are never in earnest."

"You think so; you will find I am in earnest in some things."

"'*Ow* de do?" said Lady Coxe.

The couple looked up at the new-comer—it was the Count.

"Oh, Congte, I did not know you were asked."

"I go to St James's Club to read papers and meet Gorillian Minister. He great friend Lady Ilminster—bring me and present me."

"You dance this waltz with me," said Bromley hurriedly to Constance.

She was pale and red by turns, and heard not what he said.

Touching her hand slightly, he repeated his observation.

With an effort she answered—

"Oh yes; of course, I remember."

The music struck up in the distance, and the whole party left for a distant lawn dedicated to dancing.

A circle was formed. A band was stationed in a kiosk, and the first strains had just begun, when Lady Ilminster beckoned to Augustus.

"Do you know that Count Rabelais?"

"A little."

"He is not a friend of yours?"

"No, I cannot say he is."

"The Gorillian Minister brought him. I have asked Madame Carron to come and superintend some charades. She told me that an acquaintance of hers, Count Rabelais, was a capital actor, and I asked Don Marmosetto Uran y Babon to bring him. Now the Bushman Minister, who hates Don Marmosetto, tells me this Count is very disreputable."

"Well, it can't be helped now he's here. You had better set him at charades."

Augustus returned for his partner. There she was, twirling in the arms of the Count.

"He has asked her to take a turn, but no. There they are stopping opposite, as though to avoid me. Shall I go and take her away and kick the Count? No good."

The waltz was over, and Bromley, with entire self-possession, walked over to Constance.

"You have disappointed me this time, Miss Coxe," he said, good-naturedly. "Will you dance the next quadrille?"

"Mademoiselle is already engaged to me," grinned the Count.

"Then perhaps the waltz after that."

Bromley looked steadily at the Count, in a manner the latter did not seem to admire.

"Oh yes, yes," almost screamed Constance, whose countenance during this scene had betrayed the emotion she underwent.

Bromley, with a slight bow, turned away. He cannot, this time, deny his knowledge of her being engaged to me.

He directed his steps to the room used as a theatre, which abutted on the garden. A veranda outside was covered in for a green-room. The large oriel window was to serve as a stage. Entering the house by the ordinary doorway, he proceeded to the body of the theatre. He arranged a few of the ornaments, and then sat down to muse.

There is certainly nothing so discreditable as eavesdropping. Nothing can justify it, and no possible excuse can be alleged in palliation of such an offence; but in this life the best of us occasionally commit an unjustifiable action. We have all of us said foolish things which, in the retirement of our bed-clothes, flash across us, and make us burn with shame. We have all put up from friends with

affronts which we should have resented; for, alas! in this age we are as afraid of being called tetchy as of being considered dishonourable.

We have all of us, except myself and you, kind reader—we have all of us, at least once in our lives, been the authors of some little act which Paley would not have approved, and Butler would have refused to ratify.

So, on this occasion, Bromley was guilty of a great moral offence. He heard voices—voices not unknown to him—and he listened.

"Not dancing, Achille?" spoke a voice in French.

"The dancing is suspended for a tombola, and I come to pay my homage to my sister."

"Hush, Achille, for heaven's sake! We may be overheard."

"And if so?"

"The object of my life would be at an end. Yes, Achille, my pride is foolish, ridiculous. To it I have sacrificed my life, my position, nay, my love. When my mother commended you to me as the heir—the ruined heir of our house—it was my resolve that you should once again resume the place my father had forfeited. It might have been done sooner, Achille, in time even for me to enjoy the sweets of life. Already had my pen achieved more than success, when that fatal passion which has destroyed us before, displayed itself in you. For you I have slaved and worn out my life. For you

have I polluted my existence by publicity. For you, or rather, for our name, I have sacrificed the hopes and joys of a household. Even now, ruined as we are, my daily labour supplies your extravagance. If once the stage could be connected with your name, Achille, my heart would break."

"This is all very well, belle dame—very pretty and very dramatic. The charades have not yet commenced. I meant to say that, if overheard calling you my sister, all would perceive the joke."

"It must end some day, Achille. Heaven make you kinder to that lovely girl than to me. When once you are married I shall retire to beautiful Italy."

"The dream of actresses."

"Thank you, Achille. The actress will not sully your name by her presence."

"Ah, bah! cousine. Once married to the little Cogues, and, actress or no actress, you share the booty."

"Achille, the pride that has enabled me to support you in affluence will not admit of your affluence to support me. It is you who have chosen the way to riches by marriage. Opposed to it at first, I yielded to your wishes, though I had offered to you many a more honourable career. I presented to you that detestable woman Mélanie to inform you of the girl's movements and her friends. I

disliked, I loathed the intrigue, but it was undertaken, and it must be accomplished, for my strength is giving way."

"Mélanie is a cleverer woman than you, Adelgonde. She has shown me a way to success that you would never have dreamt of."

"Indeed! I hope it is honourable."

"Honourable, inasmuch as it profits her as well as myself."

"What is it?"

Bromley bent forward to listen, but the Count spoke in too low a tone.

"Good heaven, Achille! Have you stooped to this?" cried the actress.

"Come, no heroics, belle dame. I hear the music of the dance, and I go to pulverise my rival."

"Have we fallen as low as this?" murmured the actress. Bromley heard a window open, the retreating steps of the Count, and the chords of the distant music. Noiselessly he left the theatre, and hurried to the lawn.

The Count had reached Constance about a minute before him. She was standing with her mother apart from the dance. No one was near the group as Bromley approached.

"This is my dance, Miss Constance," he observed, offering his arm.

"Forgive me, Monsieur Bromley. It is mine."

"You must be mistaken, Count. You yourself heard the engagement."

"One word apart, Monsieur Bromley."

"Certainly." The two retired to a grove adjacent.

"You recollect the compact we made, my friend, the night of the ball at Conisbro' House?"

"I recollect the compact you proposed."

"My part of it is complete, I daresay, with your assistance. Rely on me as regards la petite belle-sœur la Florence. Mademoiselle Constance, with the consent of Miladi Cogues and her own, is my affianced bride."

"Indeed, Monsieur le Comte! till this moment I believed she was mine. You will pardon me in your turn, but for such a statement I must, under the circumstances, demand a little corroboration—especially as the waltz is already begun."

Taking the Count's arm, he forced rather than persuaded him to the spot where Lady Coxe and her daughter were still standing. Constance was pale as death—Lady Coxe a deep magenta.

Lady Coxe, the Count tells me I may congratulate you on having secured him as a son-in-law. May I do so?"

"'E 'as my full consent."

"And, Miss Constance, may I offer you my felicitations?"

"Y—y——" The word was never completed, for Constance fell to the ground.

As the Count hurried with the crowd to assist the swooning girl, a strong arm took his, and a firm voice whispered in his ear, "Your place is not here; it is with your sister in the theatre."

Rabelais turned towards the young man with the eyes of a frightened ape, and slunk away.

In a few minutes Bromley had lifted Constance into her carriage, and, with Florence and Lady Coxe, was driving towards London.

The skirts had much contracted for the occasion.

"Did 'e tell any one but you?" asked Lady Coxe, in an anxious whisper.

"No one."

"Then, for 'eaven's sake, don't breathe it to Sir Joshphat, and take the carriage on for Dr Leadbitter."

Bromley bowed reassuringly, and hurried on, in the family coach, to Bedford Square.

Dr Leadbitter was at home, and Constance was raving in a fever.

## CHAPTER XIV.

There is a wonderful inclination to practical paradox in the human mind. If a man be dull, the world charitably sets him down as sound. If he be clever, the world, with equal charity, sets him down as unscrupulous. If a man be courteous, he

is instantly condemned as designing; if brutal, lauded as straightforward.

But if this natural impulse to moral compensation be the general bias of the human intellect, it assumes twofold force in the special case of medical men. Perhaps with such men personal characteristics are more prominently displayed; perhaps the confidence of the patient reposing in the individuality of his advisers gives a factitious importance to minor peculiarities.

Be it how it may, you have never yet seen an Asclepiad whose manners were not, in some respect, different from those of his fellow-creatures.

Great or small, clever or stupid, he has managed to inspire confidence, or to impose successfully on some circle of patients, however contracted.

Amongst these he is an authority. His individual influence is so great, that but little trust is reposed in his art when practised by another.

If in large practice, his patients consider him deserving of it; if in small practice, they esteem him an ill-used man. He is their guide and their friend as well as their philosopher; godfather to their children, trustee to their settlements, legatee to their wills. He is present at their *births* and deaths, generally at their weddings. He knows their pecuniary difficulties, their family quarrels; the husband's distrust, or the wife's jealousy; the son's folly, and the daughter's infatuation. He can

go down the street and schedule out each house as to its specific non-observance of the decalogue. He can tell you who steals, who commits murder, or who commits any other sin of the first magnitude.

There are thousands of little secrets confided to the diary of a physician; thousands of fees to his pocket, for little occurrences which, like the fees, go no further than himself.

By the highest he is treated almost as an equal; by the wisest he is respected as a man of science and of power. If not profoundly versed in our constitution, he knows us in our moments of weakness, and that knowledge alone makes him the master of most of us.

But before we admit him to this position, we minutely examine his qualities, or accept the judgment of them passed by the universal suffrage of mortal men.

Science of anatomy is sufficient for the surgeon; but science of the world is the best passport for the medical man.

We require him to cure our bodies—most doctors can do that.

But we occasionally require from him medicaments for our minds. This requires the skill of a man of the world.

From such premises we conclude that perfection in art is not the keystone of medical fame. The serpent was dedicated to Æsculapius, the emblem

of his foresight as well as of his craft. Nor would the symbol misrepresent the physicians of Babylon.

Sir Erasistratus will be enabled to discover that Duke Antiochus is fearfully in love with Countess Stratonice. Sir Paulus will gain favour with the patrons of art by the number of statues decorating his country-place at Ægina. Sir Democritus exposes somnambulism, mesmerism, homœopathy, and spirit-rapping. Dr Andrew Machaon displays administrative qualities in the army medical department; while Sir Podalirius, K.C.B., after exhibiting geniality at the mess-table and intrepidity in the field, marries the daughter of King Damætas, and sets up in Grosvener Square. Dr Chrysippus, who has not yet attained the purple, manages to oppose the dogmatists, and to soar into practice by his agreeable conversation and sparkling jests. Heraclitus is the man-hater, declines to visit sovereigns, and frightens poor women into new diseases by a savage laugh and peremptory brutality. Sir Oribasius, who ushers young peers into the world, endears himself to the mothers by affectionate epithets and profuse gossip; and Sir Sextus Empiricus drives a flourishing trade and a chariot by periodic journeys to the equator, and the administration of stimulants to statesmen. All have some quality independent of their art. Few rely on their craft, and their craft alone, for practice or popularity, competency or knighthood. Writers require an *ars*

*celare artem;* physicians an art to thrust their skill into prominence. In France this is considered charlatanerie; in England it is styled humbug. Yet what great man is, consciously or unconsciously, free from this vice?

Has Buncombe no place in our social, political, scientific, or ecclesiastical system?

Some few have tried the narrow, narrow path. They labour in their youth, they labour in their manhood. "They live forgotten—they die forlorn." An hospital is the scene of their triumphs, a parish-rate forms their emolument. The parson and the overseer compose their society, and the blessings of the poor their fame.

Yet there are first-rate men amidst the great physicians of Babylon.

Heaven bless them! How would the young Babylonians be born without them, or how could the Babylonian ladies take their strong waters innocuously?

But Dr Leadbitter was an exception to every rule.

He was devoted to the science of medicine. It absorbed his whole mind; and indeed, together with dinners and the price-list, formed the staple of his conversation.

He lived near an hospital; and spent a useful life, pleasantly to himself, in constant attention to revolting diseases.

The hospital had been endowed chiefly from his

own purse—an expenditure owning a double origin in his charity and his love of science.

Hitherto he had never been permitted to sate himself sufficiently in the least agreeable works of his profession. His universal popularity had induced his colleagues in other hospitals to take from him this portion of his duties. To Dr Leadbitter this indulgence was purgatory. The dirtier the patient, the more complicated his disorder, the more grateful was the treatment to this worthy man. Pity and love of science formed a curious combination in his phrenology. His professional skill, therefore, had reached a height where envy had ceased to criticise, or malice to detract. Yet, unknowingly to himself, he possessed other than technical qualities; and these caused him to be sought after by those whose search is considered honourable.

In his career Leadbitter had studied deeply and variously. In his ideas every knowledge tended to enhance the value of his heart.

So intimate is the connection of our moral and physical structure, that to the eye of the accomplished physician few disorders of our frame can be disconnected from some indirect and intellectual cause. As mental emotions form the features of manhood, so is the innermost thought of man betrayed by some external indication.

Those best practised to command expression can

ill disguise their feelings from the true physiologist. The smile is forced that dissembles anger, the gravity overcharged that suppresses mirth.

However perfect the acting, there are some, even among mortals, to whose far-seeing eye acting can never compete with nature. Such a one was Dr Leadbitter, fat, foolish, as he looked. In him intuitive perception was refined by rare and delicate study. To know the diseases of a singer he would hear her song, of an orator his speech. He would examine the portrait of a statesman, and study his biography, then tell you his organic disorders. Nor was his rare skill unknown or unappreciated. To him would the singer and statesman repair, as a last resource, glad to stand in his anteroom and vie with a pauper for an audience.

Yet Leadbitter, though astute, was simple. He made more by speculation than by his profession.

His kindness of heart and his passion for disagreeable affections gave to the pauper, in his eyes, a higher value than the statesman. He might have been a baronet, but he had no wife to urge him thereunto. A comfortable dinner was his sole vice, a few good cases his only desire.

He wore the traditional black clothes and white neckcloth, the capacious watch in the capacious fob. He carried the rattan with the gold knob, and, at times, even buckles in his shoes.

A little flower or sprig bedecked his upper button-

hole. His walk was a trot, and a smile ever on his lips.

Moreover, nothing could be more commonplace than his ordinary conversation. A few truisms, parliamentary interjections, many technical references. His action was as that of one feeling a pulse, and he was always in a hurry to turn away and leave the room.

"Won't you have a glass of wine, Mr Bromley?" asked the doctor, hospitably.

"Thanks, I am going to dine later."

"Commodeque, Erasistratus dixit, sæpe, interiore parte humorem non requirente, os et fauces requirere."

Dr Leadbitter lost no time in getting into the carriage.

The doctor overcame the gourmet, and, though at dinner, the voice of duty and of friendship prevailed.

"My dear doctor," said Bromley, "Miss Constance has fallen very ill. She fell to the ground at Lady Ilminster's breakfast. She was insensible all the way home. I suppose they have put her to bed, for I drove off at once for you."

"Hear, hear!" responded the doctor.

"Now, doctor, between ourselves, I think Miss Constance has something on her mind."

"Hear, hear! Eros, I suppose. Soon cured."

"Something more than that."

"Nothing cryptogamic, I hope?"

"I have a moral certainty of the cause, but no legal evidence yet. If you will accept my assurance without seeking any corroboration, I will tell you my surmises—to me certainties—which, perhaps, may guide you in your treatment."

"HEAR, HEAR!"

"My impression is, that Lady Coxe and Miss Constance Coxe are deeply in debt to Madame Mélanie the dressmaker. They are afraid to own it to Sir Jehoshaphat. Count Rabelais has got possession of the secret, and holds it *in terrorem* over Constance.

"He has conciliated the friendship and advocacy of Lady Coxe—perhaps by the same means; and he has extorted from Constance a promise of marriage. Now, what would you advise?"

"The whole thing should be told to Sir Jehoshaphat. Yet, I think, he would never forgive Lady Coxe, whatever treatment he might pursue towards his daughter. I have known him from boyhood. His temperament is bilious and nervous. About money matters, though more than liberal, he is obdurate."

"At any rate, it would be better avoided, for the present at least."

"Hear, hear!"

"I should think the woman Mélanie might be frightened for having inveigled a girl under age."

"Hear, hear! But suppose Lady Coxe knew of her daughter's debts?"

"But perhaps she does not. As soon as I can get my surmises into shape, I will, with your permission, consult you."

"Hear, hear! Come to me directly you have any news—day or night. Meanwhile, I will pursue the soothing system—calming draughts. I shall tell Lady Coxe at once that I know the whole story. That will keep her quiet."

By this time the carriage had again arrived in Grosvenor Square.

"How is Miss Constance?"

"Very bad, sir."

"Hear, hear!" murmured the doctor mournfully.

Constance was in a high fever. Bromley found a letter on his table. He opened it. It was but a few lines.

"My dear Friend,—The family is that of Sir J. Coxe, Bart., M.P., the banker. Her ladyship owes about £2000; her daughter Constance about £900. The rest of the news I hope to obtain in a day or two.—Yours very sincerely, K. M."

A paper fluttered forth and fell to the ground. Bromley picked it up. It was folded, flimsy as a bank-note. He opened it. It was headed with the image and superscription of Madame Mé-

lanie. Below were items representing a total of £27, 4s. 8d.

## CHAPTER XV.

"Hear, hear! Well, you've not lost much time, Mr Bromley," said the doctor, as Bromley entered the room where he was resuming his interrupted meal.

"How have you found Miss Constance?"

"I can say nothing till to-morrow. However, I do not think there is much to fear. Lady Coxe will do all I tell her. I gave her a quietus, by informing her I knew of all her difficulties. It rather relieved her, I think. *Experimentum periculosum.* It succeeded, however. One glass of wine? *Lætificat cor hominis.*"

"Thank you, I have not yet dined."

"Well, I'll ask you again—the third time of asking, and you'll take one. Three scruples make one dram! Ho, ho! Hear, hear!"

He poured out a bumper of burgundy, and motioned his young friend to proceed.

"Since leaving you, my suspicions have been confirmed." Bromley showed the letter, and told Dr Leadbitter the whole story.

"Hear, hear, young man," said the doctor, as his young friend finished. "The disease is plainer than the remedy."

"The sum is very large, or I could manage it."

"I should not allow Constance to pay her—at least for some time. I am an old man. You are a young one. I should not wonder if there were some few figures in my favour at Coutts's. Sir Jehoshaphat is an old friend of mine—as honourable a man as ever lived. Good digestion, though bilious. I should like to break the force of the blow."

Sir Jehoshaphat Coxe sallied forth the next morning with a heavy heart and a glowing brow.

He marched down Grosvenor Street slowly. At length he reached the house of Madame Mélanie.

With stately steps, and firm determination, he walked up the stairs, and entered the room of the dressmaker. She received him with a curtsey and a smile.

"Woman!" he burst out, "I hear you have profited by the folly of an old woman and the imprudence of a young one. Give me the bills of my wife and daughter that I may pay them."

"They owe me nothing, Monsieur."

"What, woman! do you still carry on the farce? They themselves have told me of this."

"They owe me nothing, Sir Jehoshaphat. Their bills were paid an hour since."

"By whom?"

"By Mr Augustus Bromley."

The sequel is well known to my readers. Mr Bromley espoused Miss Constance. He has been standing for a county, and the result of the poll is expected by telegraph this evening.

Madame Mélanie having, in a moment of forgetfulness, returned to her old habits, and abstracted a small casket from the house of one of her customers, is expiating her crimes in a spot set aside for such purposes. Count Rabelais has disappeared from the social horizon, and is supposed to be gaining an honest livelihood as a courier.

Madame Carron, under the advice of Dr Leadbitter, laid aside her family pride, and married a very respectable impresario, who turns her talents to advantage, and lays by her earnings for that rainy day to which managers more than ordinary mortals are liable. Lady Coxe will not contract any more debts, though she still nourishes a partiality for port. Florence married on the same day as her sister, and Letitia seems likely to justify the surmise of Count Rabelais, by blessing the hearth of Mr Whiting. W.

# THE ENGINE-DRIVER TO HIS ENGINE.

[*MAGA.* DECEMBER 1862.]

*Air*—"The Iron Horse."

PUT forth your force, my iron horse, with limbs that never tire !
The best of oil shall feed your joints, and the best of coal your fire ;
So off we tear from Euston Square, to beat the swift south wind,
As we rattle along the North-West rail, with the special train behind :—

Dash along, crash along, sixty miles an hour !
Right through old England flee !
For I am bound to see my love,
Far away in the North Countrie.

Like a train of ghosts, the telegraph posts go wildly trooping by,
While one by one the milestones run, and off behind us fly :
Like foaming wine it fires my blood to see your lightning speed,—
Arabia's race ne'er matched your pace, my gallant steam-borne steed !

Wheel along, squeal along, sixty miles an hour!
Right through old England flee!
For I am bound to see my love,
Far away in the North Countrie.

My blessing on old George Stephenson! let his fame for ever last;
For he was the man that found the plan to make you run so fast:
His arm was strong, his head was long, he knew not guile nor fear;
When I think of him, it makes me proud that *I* am an engineer!

Tear along, flare along, sixty miles an hour!
Right through old England flee!
For I am bound to see my love,
Far away in the North Countrie.

Now Thames and Trent are far behind, and evening's shades are come;
Before my eyes the brown hills rise that guard my true-love's home:
Even now she stands, my own dear lass! beside the cottage door,
And she listens for the whistle shrill, and the blast-pipe's rattling roar:—

Roll along, bowl along, sixty miles an hour!
Right through old England flee!
For I am bound to see my love,
At home in the North Countrie.

W. J. M. R.

# THE COACHMAN OF THE "SKYLARK."

[*MAGA.* DECEMBER 1862.]

[IN the good old times, before railways were known, the "Skylark," on the ——— and ——— road, was the fastest coach, and its driver, Joseph ———, the best and smartest coachman, in England. The "Skylark" has long ago gone the way of all coaches; and Joe is now landlord of the "Horns," at ———, where long may he flourish!]

*Air*—"Four high-mettled steeds."

YE passengers so bothered,
Who snore in rattling trains,
By dusty vapour smothered,
Awake, and hear my strains!
I'll tell you of the good old days,
For ever past and gone,
Before your pestilent railways
Had spoiled all sorts of fun,—
When Joe, with light but steady hand,
Did four high-mettled steeds command,
And well was known, through all the land,
The Coachman of the "Skylark."

Can any greasy stoker
With dashing Joe compare?
He was a jovial joker,
And company most rare.

Then wind and weather we defied,
We scorned your well-glazed car,
And gladly on the box would ride,
To smoke a mild cigar
With Joe, whose light but steady hand
Did four high-mettled steeds command ;—
O ! well was known, through all the land,
The Coachman of the "Skylark."

Where your long, dismal tunnel,
Gropes through yon lofty hill
(A pitch-dark, noisome funnel,
That might old Harry kill),
We, on the "Skylark," used to glide
Up from the smiling vale,
And on the mountain's heathy side
The freshening breeze inhale,
While Joe, with light but steady hand,
Did four high-mettled steeds command ;—
O ! well was known, through all the land,
The Coachman of the "Skylark."

Where yon embankment ugly
Has marred the pleasant scene,
A little inn stood snugly
Beside the village-green :
'Twas there the "Skylark" stopped to dine,
And famous was the cheer ;
Good were the victuals, old the wine,
And strong the foaming beer
For Joe, whose light but steady hand
Did four high-mettled steeds command ;—
O ! well was known, through all the land,
The Coachman of the "Skylark."

And one dwelt in that valley
Would make a desert shine:
The sparkling eyes of Sally
Eclipsed her father's wine.
O! where's the flinty heart that could
Withstand that lovely lass,
As smiling at the bar she stood,
And filled a parting glass
For Joe, whose light but steady hand
Did four high-mettled steeds command;—
O! well was known, through all the land,
The Coachman of the "Skylark."

Those days are gone for ever—
The "Skylark" is no more;
And poor old Joe shall never
More drive his coach-and-four.
Then let us to the "Horns" repair,
And, with a flowing bowl,
Let's try to banish grief and care,
And cheer the good old soul
Of Joe, whose light but steady hand
Did once four mettled steeds command,
When well was known, through all the land,
The Coachman of the "Skylark"!

W. J. M. R.

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3964

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